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## Author, Author

Competition No 80 Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answers so that they reach this office not later than August 13. A prize of £10 is offered for the first correct set of answers to be opened, or failing that, the most nearly correct - in which case inspired guesswork will also be taken into consideration. Entries, marked 'Author, Author' on the envelope, should be addressed to the Editor, <i>Times Literary Supplement</i> , PO Box 7, 200 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8EZ. The solution and results will appear on August 20.	own sake and for nothing else - I have met with women who I really think would like to be married to a Poem and to be given away by a Novel. 3 You can hardly imagine that I and Lord B- would dream of allowing our only daughter - a girl brought up with the utmost care - to marry into a cloak-room, and form an alliance with a parcel. Competition No 76 Winner: Deborah J. Knuth Answers: 1 My darling one, I am so miserable; I am so terribly sorry. I came on Saturday. I felt desperate and I just wanted to see your face. My cold has come out. I do hope I didn't give it to you or Crystal. I don't think I can have done. Iris Murdoch, <i>A Word Child</i> .	2 Allison darling, please believe that if it was to be anyone, it would have been you; that I've really been far sadder than I could show, if we were not both to go mad. Please wear the earrings. Please take this money and buy a scooter, and go where we used to go - or do what you want with it. Please look after yourself. Oh God, if only I was worth waiting for. John Fowles, <i>The Magus</i> . 3 My Precious Dream-Rabbit, I'm writing this on the terrace outside the hotel. It's a lovely day, and how I wish you were with me, because I miss you all the time, and it's perfectly foul to think that when I get back you will have popped off to America and I shall not see you for ages. I'm dashed if I know how I shall stick it out. P. G. Wodehouse, <i>The Luck of the Bodkins</i> .
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## The display of mind

John Bayley

BARBARA HARDY

Particularities: Readings in George Eliot  
204pp. Peter Owen. £10.50.  
07206 05997

GORDON S. HAIGHT and ROSAMARY T. VANARSDEL (Editors)

George Eliot: A Centenary Tribute  
174pp. Macmillan. £17.50.  
0333 314751

No one has been more successful than Barbara Hardy at analysing the ways in which George Eliot goes about her business as a novelist. Like Proust, whom she greatly influenced, George Eliot uses intelligence itself as a method of stylization: both novelists could be said to secure the necessary 'unreality' of the successful novel by subjecting its ingredients - theme, setting and characters - to the frankest possible display of mind. Everything is sorted out and arranged, explained and revealed as a mode of shape and symmetry. Impossible to imagine either novelist creating the sort of characters who, like most of us, are quite simply capable of anything and of nothing, the sort of characters who, in successful art, become Shandys and Falstaffs, Hamlets and Emma Bovarys.

Such an open and unbounded exercise of intelligence produces in its own way the effective limitations and the conventional signs of a Wodehouse scenario or a Scudéry romance. What becomes of the uncertainty in which each person's life is lived in respect of the attentions of his curious neighbour, when that neighbour has all the novelist's privileges? What becomes, specifically, of the unknown relationship between Casaubon and Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, about which so many critics have laid down law, in terms of its thematic, social, and symbolic significance? The relationship is stylized and set apart by the author, in the same manner and for the same reasons that Fielding sets apart the relation of Tom and Sophia, or Stevenson that of Jim Hawkins and Long John Silver. What in them is standard novelist's instinct and convention is for George Eliot a way of creating a climate of questioning by means of intelligence itself. It helps her secure her artifice in what seems an open field.

As Barbara Hardy puts it in the first and most characteristic of the essays, 'Implication and Incompleteness in *Middlemarch*', Eliot handles explicit situations, and 'her refusal to give names is probably less a matter of social decorum than a matter of dramatic effect'. She compounds the expository intelligence of the essayist with the time-honoured devices of the novelist and playwright, both historical and moral. The result is what E. M. Forster would have called 'faking' - the novelist-artist's most blessed and essential activity - though of a highly instructive and entertaining sort. And the greatest ally of faking is reticence.

This reticence, because it is not silence, is compatible with a truthful and complete account of what is like for Dorothea to be married to Casaubon, and what it was like for Casaubon to be married to Dorothea. We may not see the point all at once, but what we do, I suggest, everything fits. But the novel's truthfulness is not sustained. In Dorothea's relation with Will we have much more than a refusal to name the passions. We have a refusal even to suggest them. She is reticent about Dorothea and Casaubon, but she leaves things out in her treatment of Dorothea and Will. The omission is both an unrealistic element in an unusually realistic novel and the cause of imbalance. We can make the criticism in terms of truth and in terms of form. *Middlemarch* has often been praised as a great realistic novel; and, more latterly, as a triumph of unified organization, but both its realism and its unity are flawed.

That sets almost too many horses running around. Might it not - for a

start - be just as appropriate to say that the novel's truth, and its realism, both of which are exceedingly approximate and ambiguous terms, are not compromised by any weakness or flaw, such as the relation of Dorothea and Will, but are equally present and not present throughout the whole of the narrative? What seems like truth in the presentation of the Casaubon/Dorothea marriage looks different in the account of that of Dorothea and Will, and yet both are determined by the same kinds of method. George Eliot's intelligence is simply working in its habitual way upon what the narrative specifies. A lot of honeymoons, and not just those between young nubile women and older invalidish men, start with physical and sexual difficulties which are got over in time. Dorothea might well have had a child or two and discovered kinds of modified contentment within her marriage to Casaubon. If the latter had died and she had married Will she might have had another child or two and found different sorts of disillusionment too. But this is no use to the kind of narrative George Eliot has to tell us, a narrative in which, as Barbara Hardy remarks, Eros and Thanatos must be contrasted both vigorously and perceptively.

And there's the rub. George Eliot's deepest intelligence, one might feel, is in fact superior to any such contrast which her narrative drive and will-power entail upon her. And so what can be convincingly faked in the case of Casaubon and Dorothea is much less convincing in the case of Will's life-giving marriage to Dorothea. The concealed fake leads naturally to the unconcealable one. Unlike Proust, George Eliot is still in the grip of basic mythic fictional patterns, which she thinks intelligence can control and shape to its own ends, but which in fact render intelligence artificial and subvert its kind of open confident authority until these incongruously take on the novel's own traditional and predictable colorations.

It is in order to ignore these that the critic, though not, I think, the common reader, goes to such lengths in speculating and assigning reasons, determined to disengage George Eliot's powers of perception and imagination from the novellistic forms

they have had to assume, as if a separable element of 'truth' lay behind the appearances the novelist is working up. 'I do not think', says Barbara Hardy, 'that the truthfulness of *Middlemarch* is impaired because George Eliot does not tell us outright that Casaubon is impotent'. There is a very natural mix-up here about the suitability of terms, which does credit both to George Eliot's powers of authorial mimesis and to the loving care with which Barbara Hardy treats her. It is admirable, and useful, still to be able to treat such great works of art as if what was in them were real, as if Lady Macbeth might have had children or might not have had. But this pretence, like the artist's faking itself, must be tempered with a proper sense of how every play or novel has to work as a contraption. George Eliot is not writing a biography of her characters, though Richard Ellmann, that expert biographer, paid her - perhaps with tongue a little in cheek - the same sort of compliment as Barbara Hardy does, in his essay on 'Dorothea's Husband' in *Golden Codgers: Biographical Speculations*.

Was Casaubon impotent, or not? His creator's reticence is designed precisely to suggest there is a real answer. A modern novelist must say he was, or was not, and in so doing would reveal that the whole business was nothing but a fiction which the writer was making up. In making truth impossible to get at, reticence suggests that truth has - in this context - a real existence. Henry James was both right and wrong when, in the preface to *The Turn of the Screw*, he profited (as so often) from the Eliot precedent and disowned her by deliberately disowning the weakness of 'specification'. It is that specification which Barbara Hardy and Richard Ellmann are intent on, and good luck to them. That it is far from weak is shown by their interest, and by every reader's interest - in art as in life - in what exactly went on, or failed to go on, between two married people.

George Eliot's specification about Mr Casaubon is not weak in itself, and yet it leads to weakness, to the impossibility of specifying anything at all about what was so 'right' in the relations of Will and Dorothea. The vulgarity of suggesting, in a novel that sought so largely to inculcate enlightenment and humanity, that the

heroine was unhappy because her first husband was sexually inadequate, and afterwards happy because her second was not, would certainly have been far from the author's intention. To specify was, in James's view, always a danger for the novelist, because it could lead to this kind of bathos; and *The Turn of the Screw* avoids the weakness of specifying either that the ghosts were real or that the governess was a deluded hysteric. The narrative has, in this sense, no 'truth' to be got at. But a narrative as spacious and in the best sense as pretentious as *Middlemarch* cannot afford to leave matters in this state deliberately. The great strength of such a narrative is precisely that there is such real bathos, such elemental human desires and fears, lurking at the bottom of it, and the reader sees these things through George Eliot's medium as he sees - indeed has his attention much more obviously directed to - the thematic and moral pattern which constitutes the essential and proper 'unreality' of the novel.

One could say that in a novel as great as *Middlemarch* the unrealities are as it were not only compensated for, but purged out and transformed, by the involuntary truths that lie about - not fully under the author's control, nor allowed for in her scheme of things. One such is suggested by the comment of the character in Henry James's half-sardonic, half-admiring little dialogue on George Eliot, who opines that if Dorothea had married again at all she would have married a guardsman. Such crudities are indeed a part of the implicit vision. One of the paradoxical strengths of *Middlemarch* is that it treats of body and soul - those characteristic Victorian entities - with equal vigour, and without enfeebling them into a spurious unity. Gordon Haight put the matter quaintly but succinctly in his biography when he spoke of George Eliot's 'unfortunately balanced mental and animal regions'. This imbalance is one secret of the special kind of 'literariness' - in Todorov's sense - which informs her novels. Her intelligence promises revelations while her sense of art exploits the reticence which Barbara Hardy rightly insists on. Another, even more important, aspect of it is her brilliant betrayal of the Bildungsroman method, the very method her 'literariness' seems especially to

Great novelists must make use of their lives and those of other people on their own terms. Lawrence was well aware of Fryda's infidelities; George Eliot possibly only discovered about Lewes's after he died. But in this context neither author could, as it were, put themselves in their own position. Lawrence did so in *Sons and Lovers*, and his wife subsequently figures in everything he wrote, but not, except in one or two ambiguous instances, as the casually unfaithful person who was. Lawrence recounts Connie Chatterley's surreptitious infidelities, but the story to Clifford Chatterley is not to him. There is something deeply touching about the artist's compulsion to remove sex on to a higher plane - the plane of his own being perceived in fulfillment - while taking a magisterial line with the sex lives of other people. Perhaps all 'successful' people do this; certainly both Lawrence and George Eliot do so as successful novelists; but while Lawrence's fantasies about himself have a sure and splendid confidence, as well as a kind of interior fun, George Eliot's projection of herself into happy marriage with Ladislaw remains unconfident and unconvincing. At the human level, the level of 'life' which Barbara Hardy rightly calls as witness, it is a part of the effectiveness of the novel that it should be so.

The most subtle thing that 'life' requires of a novelist is the sacrifice of his or her own vulnerability. George Eliot pays this price invariably. If less voluntarily than Lawrence in his autobiographical fantasies of revenge against Middleton Murry and others, George Eliot's revenges on the Rosamonds and Lydgates show her up as much as does the fantasy life with Ladislaw, the perfect physical and intellectual helpmate; but, for a great novelist, to be shown up this way is a positive asset, and in George Eliot's case in particular it corrects the retributive majesty of the biographical

## The Seagull

When I was a child, before I knew the word for a snowstorm, before I remember a tree or a field, I saw an endless grey afternoon coming. I knew a bird singing in the sun was the same as a dog barking in the dark. A pigeon in a hillyard fluttered against a kitchen window, - my first clear memory of terror. I kept secret, my intimations I kept secret.

This winter I hung a grey and white stuffed felt seagull from the cord of my window shade, a reminder of good times by the sea, of Chekhov and impossible love. I took comfort from the gull, the graceful shape sometimes lifted a wing in the drafty room. Once when I looked at the gull I saw through the window a living seagull glide toward me then disappear, - what a rush of life! I remember its hesitations, while inside the room the senseless symbol little more than a bedroom slipper dangled on a string.

Beyond argument, my oldest emotion hangs like a gull in the distant sky. Byes behind bars of mud and salt see some dark thing below, - my roof under the sea. Only the sky is taken for granted. In the quiet morning light, terror's the only bird I know, - although birds have fed from my hand.

Stanley Moss



approach. The discerning novelist can be almost as part of his own totality of technique, as helpless and confused as Hettie or Gwendolen, as liable as they are to crude egotism and unsatisfied desire. Conversely novelists such as Meredith or Aldous Huxley lack this life-giving ability to reveal themselves as part of the price for revealing others. It is a gift which D. H. Lawrence or Evelyn Waugh, for example, possessed abundantly, and eddily enough George Eliot's blend of lofty positivism and lively emotion would find itself in easy terms with Waugh's unique blend of satiric authority and incoherent self-display.

It is perhaps the therefore misleading for the critic to assume, as Barbara Hardy so emphatically and frequently does, that the truthfulness of *Middlemarch* is centred in the relations of Dorothea and Casaubon: its law, or lack of truth, in those of Dorothea and Ladislaw. She is right that this is a test case for our reading of George Eliot as a whole. But her scope and effect as a novelist do not depend on this kind of standard but on the play of her intellect and emotion, her power of Olympian analysis and her deeper power to make use of her own dry-dreams, her own uncertainty and vulnerability. Barbara Hardy is in a sense, through with much greater subtlety, standardizing the George Eliot and his "bad" George Eliot, the first a truth-teller and the second a fantasist, the first the author of "Gwendolen Harleth" and the second of *Daniel Deronda*. It is certainly arguable that in her last novel the combination of powers that she had always possessed got out of hand and alignment, developed elephantiasis as it were, but there is no doubting their presence and their enrichment in the whole of her work.

Truth, indeed - however lustily tempting for the critic to apply it to her

work - renins an ambiguous criterion. In the last sentence of her book, the last sentence of an illuminating chapter on George Eliot's view of the imagination, Barbara Hardy writes that she "voiced the dilemma of the imaginative artist, caught between the impulse to create and the impulse to utter the whole truth about things as they are". The novelist has not been born who can do the latter, nor is it what the form itself is all about. But it would be fair to say that George Eliot comes closer than most novelists to giving an impression of telling the truth: partly for the reason, as Barbara Hardy suggests, that her voice - the voice of an essayist, preacher, seer, commentator - does so, forsooth, and in separation from the stories and fictional forms that are being manipulated. The relation between truth-teller and novelist gives the impression that truth has become clear and attainable in this art form, notwithstanding the danger that the reader may come to believe this is actually the case, with a corresponding possibility of disillusionment.

That possibility is misleading, and would not occur if the real balance or contrast is perceived, between the stance of benevolent biographer, wise counsellor, and the state of impulse, confusion, and generosity which it partly hides. It is here the significance lies, rather than "in terms of truth and in terms of form". The balance between the proclaimed and the involuntary is as important for her art as it was for the consciousness of Henry James to saturate itself in the subject, and squeeze out the last drop of its significance. James, as he knew himself, is a far more unified artist, and it is this knowledge that determines his admiration of George Eliot and also his patronage, his amused acquiescence in the fatal idea that there is a Dorothea shaped by her creator, and a real

Dorothea somewhere behind. Fatal, because it directs the reader to what seems a weakness and ignores what that it is this novelist's strength. "In terms of truth and in terms of form" her truth and her form - Dorothea/Casubon and Dorothea/Ladislaw are necessary to each other. The sympathetic biographer recounts the first, leaving it to the curiosity of history: the second remains in the emotional confusion of the continuous present. The contrast between the two is enlarging and liberating, directing us from the schema of the book to the fuller consciousness of its author, not to any sense of a gap between the realistic and the unrealistic, the true and the false.

The essays in *George Eliot: A Centenary Tribute* make a fitting companion piece for Barbara Hardy's essays. Barbara Hardy emphasizes the ways in which the egoless tolerance, if not renunciation, often by the Victorian piety of preserving objects "with loving and sanctifying imagination". A prototype of her heroines here is Penny Price, true guardian of the Mansfield memory.

The capacity for treasuring things is in George Eliot, as in Jane Austen, a central illustration of imaginative capacity to see similarity in dissimilarity, to take the part for the whole, to see the world outside the self.

And she remarks on George Eliot's "never improved on phrase", which Philip Wakem uses in his declaration to Maggie - "this gift of transferred life which has come to me in loving you". That gift is also the novelist's - her emotional and authorial powers closely identified - and it helps to explain what Gordon Haight is getting at in his essay entitled "George Eliot's Bastards". His research has shown that, as surprising number of bastards in the

novels, and the loving toleration of them not only as pledges of love between two people but as bringers of low to the wider circle of those involved, is in sharp contrast with the treatment of the theme in Dickens and other Victorians. George Eliot's attitude to Mrs Transome is very different from the treatment meted out, say, to Lady Dedlock. Eliot was a friend of the prosperous textile manufacturer Charles Bray, a disciple of their mutual friend the philologist George Combe, and she was well aware of Bray's two illegitimate daughters, who were looked after and indeed cherished by his childless wife. These facts fitted straight into George Eliot's view of the passions and how they worked to sanctify human life. The tenderest thing in *Romola*, the treatment of Tito Melema's Tessa and her two bastard infants, may well come straight out of George Eliot's knowledge of her friends' situation.

Other notable essays are by Juliet McMaster on "George Eliot's Language of the Sense" and Elizabeth Daniels' "Meredithian Glimpse at Gwendolen Harleth", a heroine who anticipates Clara Middleton of *The Egoist* by three years and is followed a few years later by Diana of the Crossways. Whatever may be their similarities, and their creators' attitudes to the emancipation of intelligent women, it must surely be admitted that Gwendolen is far more real than the Meredithian shadow girls, and again for the reason that George Eliot's heart and head are in the kind of relation that produces the depth of perception in her narratives. Three other notable essays are by Ruth A. Roberts, Robert Heilman and John Hulcoop, who explore aspects of its manifold structure, the last named making the point that the "petty tedium" of the middle life, as deliberate a part of the specification as

the commonplaceness of the individual in *Scenes from Clerical Life*, shows us in scale how "the enormous mass of the undifferentiated" swallows up in time the exceptional person, the Dorothea and Ladislaw as well as the Lydgate. Marriage is as petty a medium as the Middlemarch ethos and as closely identified with it and the bourgeoisie, defined by Roland Barthes as "the social class which does not want to be named". George Eliot does not name it, but by not doing so shows just how powerful it is, and how it swallows up the brilliant and cultivated radical politician and the idealistic girl, without fuss and without anyone being aware of the fact.

There are equally valuable essays on *The Mill on the Floss* and *Felix Holt*, and one by Ira Bruce Nadel on the lives of George Eliot which sheds light on Eliot's own working methods, her biographies of her characters insensibly influencing the way her own life was later to be seen. Of special interest is Miriam Berlin's essay on "The Russian attitude to George Eliot", and on the admiration of Tolstoy and Turgenev for this profoundly committed novelist. Jacob Korg contributes a subtle and original piece on how her characters think, and Joseph Wiesenfarth shows how fanatically conscientious she was about historical detail in his account of her knowledge and use of antique gems in *Romola* and *Daniel Deronda*. Positivistic piety and ritual, and again for the reason that George Eliot's heart and head are in the kind of relation that produces the depth of perception in her narratives. Three other notable essays are by Ruth A. Roberts, Robert Heilman and John Hulcoop, who explore aspects of its manifold structure, the last named making the point that the "petty tedium" of the middle life, as deliberate a part of the specification as

## Getting Pooped aboard the Ship of Story

Lorna Sage

JOHN BARTH  
Sabbatical  
A Romance  
366pp. Secker and Warburg. £7.50.  
0 436 03675 4

With *Sabbatical* John Barth confirms that he has joined the ranks of the Old Poops. A useful category this, invented by Kurt Vonnegut for purposes of self-description. OPs are writers who once upon a time were prodigally talented, funny, ideas, but have now "mellowed" into premature anecdote: caddy, avuncular, sermonizing old buffers, whose main text is how, once upon a time... etc, since of course OPs are nothing if not self-aware. Self-awareness was one of the tricks that made their writing so exciting in the 1960s, and now it provides them with a kind of narrative afterlife, "on in death like hair and fingernails" as Barth wrote less than ten years ago in *Chimera*, his last book before the onset of OP-hood. OPs have not become conservative exactly, but they're into conservatism; in fact their central preoccupation is survival, simply going on (and on).

The cold war ethics OPs helped to dissipate in their early, euphoric period of fictive gamesmanship now once again dominates the mental weather. Our hero in *Sabbatical*, one Fenwick Scott Key Turner, is an ex-CIA man turned aspiring writer, readjusted aware that the Company's account of so-called reality, which had seemed so different stories, is well on the way to reassembling itself.

We've got a new cold war in the works, a new arms race, runaway nuclear proliferation outside the Soviet block, extortion by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, mass starvation in Africa, God knows what in southern Asia, dreadful governments in Brazil, El Salvador, Argentina, Chile, Guatemala and damned near everywhere else. The world's regressing like crazy: is it going back to go forward? But all the forward-looking people will be despectacles, along with the whines and alephs and Christs and rhinoceri. Jesu eche Christo.

Disappearances punctuate the plot.

Writing becomes a variety of salvage operation - not this time, as in Barth's last tome, *Letter*, a matter of resurrecting all one's old characters and themes and lining them up to be counted, but a smaller scale enterprise, a case of cordoning off a modest corner where the minimal imaginative properties (a Muse, a Mythical Monster) can live.

The official story, as it were, belongs to the CIA. You fit your narrative in the gaps and interstices, and round the edges. So middle-aged Fenn and his newish second wife Susan are discovered, when the book opens, returning from a nine month sabbatical cruise in their sailing yacht Pokey to home waters in the Chesapeake Bay, and looking around for ways of avoiding mainland America, staying metaphorically afloat and offshore.

The sea voyage motif, as Fenn and Susan (who is a professor of Am Lit), are very well aware, is the oldest one in the book, and that is its point. At times of stress it's best, goes the argument, to retreat to the fundamental formulae and reenact the mythic commonplaces. If the metaphors creak a bit and the story line seems a little slack, so much the better; there's something reassuring about being at the mercy of the old pattern, the narrative winds and tides. Why not return to innocence?

Not the least of sailing's pleasures, in our opinion, is that it refreshes, by literalizing them, many common figures of speech: one is forever and in fact making things ship-shape from stem to stern, casting off, getting under way... taking a different tack, getting the wind knocked out of one's sails, batten down the hatches, making for any port in a storm, getting swamped or pooped, putting an anchor out to windward, enjoying snug harbour.

Well, Pooped certainly. Innocence is hard to come by. All very well for Fenn to anti-theorize the life of the imagination - "realism is your keel and ballast of your effing Ship of Story and a good plot is your mast and sails. But magic is your wind"; however, it's not possible to remain out of sight of land. As soon as you disembark the old Company speak starts doing very unrefreshing things to your figures of speech.

Taka "cruise", for a start. Or much more sinister, "episode". This artless narratological ploy takes on a whole range of tangled, threatening

meanings: for example, the cardiac "episode" or mini heart attack that sent Fenn off on his sabbatical in the first place, and that may, just may, reflect the Company's rimoured new cardiac arrest capability, since they were naturally not too pleased with Fenn's first venture into the world of letters, a book exposing a small part of their grubby and multifarious dealings. All this we gather by way of "episode". And as the novel gets under way and starts to tack back and forth, more and more terrible and tacky and paranoid possibilities materialize. "Aspiration", as Susan will demonstrate, is a brisk technique for abortion.

The plot thickens alarmingly as we enter "the world of information, disinformation, even superdisinformation supercoded disinformation". Both Susan and Fenn turn out to be twins: Fenn's twin brother is Manfred, a high level Company operative who recruited reluctant Fenn in the first place, and who has recently disappeared, apparently in a sailing accident; Susan's twin sister is Miriam, a ruined (gangbang, Savak-tortured) ex-revolutionary, nowadays a desperate, doped and slatternly mother who supports the Right to Life Movement. In short (in long, in truth, it's much more complicated) Fenn and Susan are intimately twinned with Right and Left America.

Indeed, since Fenn claims to be descended from the man who wrote "The Star Spangled Banner" (F. S. Key) and Susan, despite or because of being Jewish, inherits a family tradition that she is distantly related to Edgar Allan Poe (hence their boat's name, Pokey) they are obviously doomed to take on board (so ho) the American Experience. And although all the twins business may sound reminiscent of the pre-OP John Barth, the epic-mockery of *The Sound and the Fury*, in fact it is presented in an unmagical fashion as a tired conundrum, a device for mooring our hero and heroine, against their will, to a past and threatening them with a future.

The more we learn about their family and Company connections the more we realize why they are so anxious to stay at sea, or, as Fenn likes to put it, "in medias fucking res". For example, brother Manfred once upon a time fathered a son, Oso, on Susan and Miriam's mother Carmen; a son who in a shadowy duel with his father - took off to join the Marxist underground in Pinochet's Chile, and has never been

seen again. It's just possible that Manfred's sown disappearance is part of a paternal plot to rescue his son from the Chilean torturers he himself helps to train. ... But no. A trip through a maze of supercoded disinformation only serves to establish that in the world scripted by the Company no "story" is ever happily resolved, or even resolved at all. To survive imaginatively, creatively, it is necessary to refuse their rotten intrigues: "Reality is wonderful... Dresful... What it is. But realism is a fucking bore." Thus Fenn will accept his cardiac "episode" as a foretaste of death, but not, for now, part of his story. And Susan will abort the child she has conceived on their cruise because the fiction she and Fenn exist in and on is too marginal to support three-D offspring.

Their is a *papier maché* ark, a fragile craft. To make the point Barth stages a nightmarish, farcical scene in which Miriam and her two anorexic kids contrive, within half an hour, to reduce the orderly shipshape cabin of their boat to a scarred, filthy, cigarette strewn slum. If you want to keep your you have, the message is, don't let fer more, don't give hostages to fortune, cherish the pleasures of the present moment ("medias fucking res" again) and make - for example - books out of them: "This story, our story, it's our house and our child... We'll have made it... and we'll live in it."

So Fenn becomes a Writer, Susan his Muse/Reader. This way they will cheat time for a while longer - "There will be sex and supper, storms and sleep; with luck there will be some years of loving work and play - and then the end, the end unspoolable." Voluntary sterility, stories about stories about, is it: "The doing and the telling, our writing and our loving - they're twins. That's our story."

Procreation (look at Plato) is the literal-minded version of the marriage of true minds. When Susan aborts her foetus she fertilizes Fenn, who promptly conjures up in the waters of which he is a mythological monster to stand in for the children of the flesh.

Not, it has to be said, a very convincing monster (nothing like as good as the splendid serpent that reared its head in Iris Murdoch's *The Sea, The Sea* on something of the same mission) but that, we are meant to understand, is hardly the point. For the creative life Barth has in mind is not - he's frank about it - particularly vivid, or inventive, or magical; more a matter of talking about writing and writing about talking, a kind of continuous Creative Writing seminar (Muse and Prof), in which all you do is play with your possibilities.

It is this tone that makes *Sabbatical* a quintessentially Old Poop product. Prof Susan, who succumbs surely too readily to the suggestion that she's somehow creating literature by reading it nicely and screwing a would-be writer, is allowed to point out that "stories can abort too. Plenty are stillborn; most die young." But this spooky thought drowns in the narrative sea with barely a plop. So insistent is the propaganda about not rocking the boat that we seem blackmailed into accepting any hint of fictional activity as involving the whole corpus of Literature. Whereas most of the time we are responding to something less grand - vague echoes of earlier Barthesian motifs, for example. One is prompted, indeed (if one can contrive to slip out from under the insidious authorial "we") to the thought that his early black comedies (*The Floating Opera*, *The End of the Road*) were much more inspiring and much better written than this post-OP, vaudevilian, chatty stuff. Also, to the realization that the more reserved he talks about the pleasures of the text, the more trivial they seem. Is the Ship of Story really such a fragile vessel? Surely not. It is characteristic of Poopedness to insinuate (cheerfully, in the manner of a good old boy who's faced up to the worst) that tiredness is universal, and that coming clean about it is all there's left to do. Which is not to say that *Sabbatical* is merely dull or depressing. OPs may be shadows of their former selves, but then their former selves were, quite something. Which is the fun of course one of the most infuriating things about them.

## Knowing everyone, seen everywhere

John Burrow

ANNE TAYLOR  
Laurence Oliphant 1829-1888  
366pp. Oxford University Press.  
£12.50.  
0 19 812676 X

A description of Laurence Oliphant might easily be read as a recipe for the archetypal Victorian traveller-adventurer: take the only son of a gentry family, Scottish for preference; provide a colonial background, with a correspondingly erratic formal education; add a smotheringly doing mother and a thick atmosphere of Evangelical piety; lace the mixture product with a dash of melancholia, a strong flavour of religious eccentricity and a whiff of sexual scandal; bring in early effervescence by access to stirring historical events, provided chiefly by the European nationalist movements of the time and the clash of cultures in

the East, and leave to go flat. Anne Taylor, in her interesting and thorough biography, the first modern study of Oliphant, speaks of "the tragicofuture" of his political career. This seems stretching it a bit. Even discounting the instability produced by his religious obsessions, nothing in his career as part-time diplomat, let alone in his undistinguished period as a Liberal MP, suggests that he gave to China and Peru - well, Nicaragua actually - talents which were meant for the Board of Trade. Everything about Oliphant suggests the erratic free-lance, perfectly suited as a restless and knowledgeable hanger-on of Palmerstonian diplomacy, and ultimately too prickly and unreliable to hold his masters' confidence even in that role. One can imagine him, perhaps, as another Stamford Raffles, but hardly as a Cabinet work-horse, least of all a Liberal one in the age of Gladstone.

The latter part of Oliphant's life was undeniably tragic, however, dominated as it was by slavish subjection to

the shady American guru and messianic cult-leader, Thomas Lake Harris, whose "Brotherhood of the New Life" he joined in 1867, and also probably - and this may be part of the expansion - by syphilis and fears of insanity. Anne Taylor lays a good deal of the blame on the family religious background - his parents were Irvingites and his mother preceded him into Harris's sect - but apart from this there were few signs of what was to come in his improbably picaresque earlier career: just the usual Victorian trouble with God, sex and headachies, held at bay by the excitement of exotic places and international intrigue (his first official posting, to help him in his later career, was to the British consulate in Constantinople, where he was actually brought on by rival, so God in this instance may be exonerated). A large part of the interest of Oliphant's life derives from the at least superficial incongruity of its elements, bringing together as it does not merely a fashionable interest in the occult but also the raw millenarian culture of American backwoods sects - appropriately his second wife was a granddaughter of Robert Owen - with the highest aristocratic Whig and royal circles. Oliphant was an amateur of Lady Palmerston's Sunday salon and a welcome guest at Balmoral (Albert approved of him) at a time when he was submitting every detail of his actions to the direction of "Father Balfour" (Harris's cult name); Oliphant's, bizarrely, though of course without its later pebbled connotations, was "Woodbine" in Salem-on-Erie.

As a young man Oliphant's first extended journey, and the subject of his first travel book, was to Nepal, setting out from Ceylon where his father was Chief Justice. Later journeys, nearly all similarly chronicled, were made rather more purposefully: as a projector in Central America and, much later, in Palestine, where, in fact, he ended his career as patron of a colony of resettled Jews; as diplomat and somewhat ineffectual conspirator, and as war correspondent for *The Times*. The range of his travels as he shuttles across the globe - a career only made possible by his, seemingly, and influence - god, knave of belief in the right place at the right time of events - in advance of it, come to seem almost absurd, like the omniscience and omnipresence of

Harold Nicolson's Eugen Malone. At one moment in his twenties he is at Trebizond during the Crimean War telling dirty jokes in Turkish to Omar Pasha, having previously surveyed the defences of Sebastopol - on a surreptitious trip through the Crimea before the war - and three pages later he is helping in a wild attempt to carve out a new state in Central America; the British admiral who brings him away turns out to be his cousin. He goes to China as secretary to Lord Elgin and sees the bombardment of Canton, and the ship's guns trained on the Malaita at Calcutta during the Mutiny. He is in Japan only four years after Perry, and while attached to the British diplomatic mission is attacked and wounded with a sword by an intrepid defender of Japanese isolation. He finds the Polish partisans in a forest on the eve of the rising of 1863. As a war correspondent he witnesses the bombardment of Paris by the Prussians and the start of the Commune inside the city.

He had his failures and near-misses. The projected mission to Schamyl, the Muslim leader of resistance to the Russians in Central Asia (familiar to readers of Lesley Blanch's *The Sabres of Paradise*) fell through. Garibaldi naturally invited him to help him invade Sicily, but for once Oliphant pleaded another engagement. He failed to deny Nice to Napoleon III by wrecking the plebiscite, and he went to Kiel in vain pursuit of the answer to the Schleswig-Holstein Question, in company with his friend the pretender Prince Frederick; he had the knack of getting on with German princelings. He also advised Speke about Burton - and talked to Gordon in Palestine about the Mahdi before the latter set out for the Sudan twenty years earlier. He had warned the future Emperor Maximilian against adventures in Central America.

So much beside knowledge, such a perfect sense of occasion, can hardly avoid making Oliphant sound like a novelist's creation, a kind of global Major Pendennis, knowing everyone, seen everywhere, not so much History Men as History Snob. Appomattox Court House begins to seem underfurnished without him, and Stanley and Livingstone to look

uncomfortable *à deux*. The connection with Harris adds the last touch of implausibility. Membership of the Brotherhood involved utter subjection of one's will to Harris's commands, and a good deal of deliberate practical humiliation; the electors of Stirling, Oliphant's seat, would have been surprised to learn that their MP sat in his rooms after a day in the House hemming petticoats at the behest of his spiritual director three thousand miles away. The tenets of the sect identified sex as the root of evil, except with one's only true spiritual "counterpart", who was seldom one's spouse and usually inconveniently undisposable. This in practice seems to have resulted in required sexual abstinence for all the males except Harris, because, as Anne Taylor puts it: "If Harris held a member of the Brotherhood of the New Life in his arms, she (with him it was always a female) might be granted a glimpse of her ordained counterpart and the love of Christ would flow down to them. Harris's own counterpart was not Emily but a being called the Lily Queen who lived mostly in heaven. The more terrestrially based females he chiefly clasped were 'Golden Rose' and 'Lady Dove'; Emily (Mrs Harris) was 'Lady Pink Ears'. Under Harris's orders - though syphilis may also have had something to do with it - Oliphant lived in complete 'purity' with his dearly loved first wife Alice. It is perhaps not surprising that after her death he thought he enjoyed spiritual contacts with her which sound very like sexual intercourse. His account of this spiritual power, called 'the Synesthesia', in his book *Solemn Remembrance, or the Higher Possibilities of Life*, and his attempts to communicate Alice's love to others through bodily contact, naturally caused scandal and clouded his reputation.

Anne Taylor thinks that the deterioration of him on these grounds was responsible for the neglect into which his name has fallen, but this is perhaps understandable. biographer's partiality: when did scandal cause neglect? That Oliphant remains an enigmatic character, difficult to get into focus, is hardly the fault of this thorough and readable biography; if he seems less like a character than a jumble of disparate elements and adventures looking for a character, to attach themselves to, perhaps that is how he seemed to himself.

## Bringing it all back home

David Montrose

EVA HANAGAN  
A Knock at the Door  
189pp. Constable. £6.50.  
0 09 464530 7

Most novelists - good, bad, and indifferent - draw on a very limited stock of ideas and idioms. Even within such constraints, some coo over surprise; others settle into a familiar routine. There are pleasures in familiarity, but usually it breeds awareness that the author is capable only of permutations. In a short career (five novels since 1977) Eva Hanagan has shown increasing signs of qualifying for that category. Her early novels, *In Thrall*, *Playmates*, and *The Upstairs*, each incorporated a woman coping with personal freedom following the death of a domineering figure: successively husband, sister, and mother. Perhaps realizing that this constituted a too-blunt filtration with familiarity, she responded with her best novel, *Holding On*, a grey-to-light-to-black comedy of a wealthy family in decline, featuring a more various array of characters. Certain motifs from its forerunners were retained, however, inviting suspicions that this might simply be a less obvious permutation, rather than a new direction. *A Knock at the Door* justifies those doubts.

Victor Fisher is a Viennese Jew, the sole survivor of a family that died in Auschwitz, who has lived in England

long enough to pass for a native. But the horror of the camps has never left him. Coextensive unemployment and inflation have replaced the disturbing sense of *deja vu*. "I've lived through it all before... In Austria, where I was a young man." Swastikas and slogans appear in Victor's street, intensifying his obsessive memories - the nature of which provides the novel's twist in the tall - of that time when every Jew feared an unexpected knock at the door. In retirement, he quits London for village life (as did Amelia Grace of *In Thrall*), seeking tranquillity to cure his long-standing anxieties.

In the village, Victor comes to fear a very different kind of knock at the door. Like Amelia Grace again, and Biddy Clifton from *Playmates*, he has an intrusive neighbour, Nora Heeshaw, whose relentless stream of homemade gifts - cakes, jam, patchwork cushions - and banal conversation reduces him to hiding behind the curtains whenever she approaches.

A comedy of domestic manners develops, at Hanagan's characteristically ebullient pace, alongside Victor's deepening dread. The slight storyline moves backwards, filling in the histories of Victor and Nora, as the moves forward, thickened with local colour. Out shopping, Victor is jostled by youths sporting cropped haircuts and Nazi insignia; he accumulates newspaper cuttings - as did Samuel Gordon-Fenn in *Holding On* - on the activities of right groups. Unwittingly, Nora makes matters worse by presenting him with striped pyjamas identical to those worn in his nightmares, by inmates of Auschwitz.

Victor becomes preoccupied with the example of his Uncle Benjamin, who hid from the Nazis by bricking himself into an attic. Foreseeing a new holocaust, Victor prepares a similar bolt-hole. At this point, with the novel three-quarters over, the narrative quickens, the comedy darkens. In nearby woods, Victor discovers a girl's body, but, fearing that he will be suspected - his face has been scratched by brambles - fails to notify the police and takes to his hideaway for the scratches to heal. A succession of mischances leaves the exit jammed and Victor trapped.

The novel closes with Victor rescued, but not before he suffers a nervous collapse. Amnesia provides relief; with his memories erased, he seems happy at last. But this promise to be a temporary condition; in the final paragraph, Nora is planning her next neighbourhood act: "even if it meant devoting all her time to the task, she'd restore poor Victor's memory and bring him back to normal".

Taken in isolation, *A Knock at the Door* is competent enough. Hanagan writes gracefully, uncluttered prose; depictions of unsettled mental states - a significant feature of all her novels - are invariably well-handled. When one recalls her previous novels, though, this one can be recognised as more of the same. Hanagan has settled easily into the groove of writing macabre little tragicomedies, at a similarly prosaic, competent level, for a long while yet. One must hope, then, that she tires of playing safe and tries something different.

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## commentary

## Overcoming the obstacle race

Krzysztof Z. Cieszkowski

The Women's Art Show 1550-1970  
Nottingham Castle Museum

The Women's Art Show covers more than four centuries, snipping just short of the present. The decision to stop at 1970 was a wise one, since the art of the last decade, produced under the direct or remote influence of the Women's Movement, represents a significant change in the way women artists have regarded themselves and their work and their position within established contexts and structures, and none of this could have been given adequate expression in terms of a handful of works coming at the end of so comprehensive an exhibition.

Even so, an exhibition of 130 works crowded together in a fairly inhospitable setting in a provincial museum cannot hope to be the last word on the subject; rather, this impressive and important exhibition (which may be seen until August 1) must be regarded as a beginning, as an initial attempt at putting together a selection of paintings that will give visual expression to the arguments put forward in books by Greer, Sutherland Harris and Nochlin, Parker and Pollock.

With limited resources, the organizers have necessarily had to accept a number of restrictions—all the works in the exhibition are from British collections, public and private; and the attempt to represent foreign art stops at 1800—artists such as Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi and Judith Leyster, who have been

retrieved from undeserved obscurity through the efforts of feminist art historians in the past decade, are represented in the exhibition, but a host of European and American women artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, whose presence in such an exhibition is essential, artists like Vigée Le Brun, Berthe Morisot, Mary Cassatt, Käthe Kollwitz, Frida Kablo and Georgia O'Keeffe, do not appear. So there is an imbalance—there is a European context up to the end of the eighteenth century, and then we are dealing only with British artists, with all that implies, particularly as far as the twentieth century is concerned. One can reproach the organizers for not advertising this sufficiently.

Obvious questions arise: if one did not know that all the works in the exhibition were by women, is there

anything in the works themselves that might suggest the fact? Or, more particularly, do the paintings differ in any perceptible way from those in a parallel exhibition that would take in works by both men and women, or by just men artists? Preconceptions—that motherhood and domestic preoccupations might be more prominent here than otherwise, that there might be fewer paintings of the female nude or of militant or industrial scenes—are not borne out by the exhibition, and if there is one thing to be learned from it, it is that women's art (at least, up to 1970) is not a thing apart, a separate genre or outlying territory of any sort, but that the most valid way of looking at it is as art that has been produced by women.

Inevitably, a high proportion of the artists represented are the daughters or sisters of better-known men artists—Frances Reynolds, Anna Alma-Tadema, Catherine and Lucy Madox Brown, Emma Sandys, Mary Severn, Rebecca Solomon. The three introductory essays to the valuable catalogue, by Jennifer Fletcher, Pamela Gerrish Nunn and Jeremy Hunt, chart the problems that women artists have faced and overcome in the past, and that must be borne in mind when looking at their work—problems of education, of acceptance by the academies and salons as well as by society in general. These are still being unearthed and studied.

The danger is that women's art will be made into a ghetto, separate and apart from "the rest", like black art; it is in everybody's interest that this be resisted. The woman artists of the past will be betrayed if they are made into symbols or objects of rhetoric, if their stature and achievement are misinterpreted or exaggerated; but they will be equally betrayed if the fact that they were women is ignored or forgotten. The value of an exhibition such as this is that it provides the evidence for the reevaluation and revision that most people, women and men, would regard as necessary; that it works towards a greater understanding of an area of the past that has been suppressed and distorted for far too long.

## Real live still life

Simon Berry

Paisley Patterns  
Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh

occasional commissions for chip shop murals and a one-man show in Dunoon.

Lucille (played with nervy intensity by Elaine Collins), unable to escape these twin flames, flutters from the one to the other spreading rancour between them. Impenetrable fog fills the Traverse cockpit (defying the ventilation system for about fifteen minutes) as *Still Life* opens in a graveyard.

Edwin Muir pointed out nearly fifty years ago that the Scot thinks in one language but feels in a completely different one, inappropriate for expressing shades of feeling, fine distinctions or anything in the way of an aesthetic experience. The particular joy of *Paisley Patterns* is the authentic use of West of Scotland patois. Byrne's characters handle language like seasoned dockers loading packing cases. Only when one bursts open do we see that its contents are fine porcelain. When reading the texts (published individually at 90p by the Salamander Press, 73 Morningside Park, Edinburgh EH10 5EZ), one delights in the verbal dexterity, the

sardonic exchanges covering a subtext of unspoken responses, and the unerring choice of irrational imagery: "This woodwork teacher was intelligent. The only thing that put me off was he had contact lenses and thumbs like baby beets", muses a friend of Lucille's. Because of this the director's approach to the text must be extremely wary.

David Hayman, with ten years' acting experience at Glasgow Citizens Theatre, has seen the need to inspire his cast with stage movement analogous to the lines they speak whilst not distracting attention from them. The pace of each play appreciably speeds up. In the case of *Still Life* reaching a hectic pitch where the actors are required to tumble like circus clowns. In general the new productions are a triumph for the combined inventiveness of director and cast, with Billy McColl and Gerard Kelly taking the laurels for their charismatic performances as Phil and Spanky. On July 24 you can see the trilogy right through, starting at 2.30. It's worth arriving a few weeks early for the Festival just for this.

## What needs complaints?

By Henry Popkin

A Think Piece  
Circle Repertory Company, New York

When he writes for the stage Jules Feiffer is no longer the outrageous social satirist of such memorable absurdist fantasies as *Little Murders*, *God Bless*, *The White House Murder Case*, and *Knock Knock*. Only a few years ago he could show us the whole city of New York going up in gunsmoke (in *Little Murders*) or Joan of Arc paying a surprise visit to a pair of ageing Jewish intellectuals (in *Knock Knock*), but he has now banished such flights of fancy. Instead, he prefers to create realistic settings and thrust into the centre of them harried individuals who bear more than a passing resemblance to the neurotic complainers in his weekly cartoons. The first play by the new Feiffer, seen on Broadway only a few months ago, was *Grownups*, in which a capable journalist breaks away from his domineering parents and his colourless wife. A second study of family anguish, *A Think Piece*, has now opened at the Circle Rep.

*A Think Piece* is less vivid than *Grownups* because some potentially interesting characters have been diminished so as not to distract us from the centre-stage complainer who is pitiful but not very dynamic or interesting. It is one thing to spend a few minutes each week following a Feiffer character through eight panels of woe but quite another to watch this mad but roadworthy housewife for nearly

two hours. Acting on admirable feminist principles, Feiffer apparently set out to correct an imbalance in the confrontation between the sexes in *Grownups*. The housewife-complainer of *A Think Piece* seems to have developed from two supporting figures in the previous play—the journalist's colourless wife and his sister, who feels eclipsed by his fame. To help us focus on her, Feiffer reduces the husband's spiritual size, making him an everlastingly genial school teacher. The housewife's successful sister, a stockbroker, is equally dim because she gets no chance to act out her success, except for a sat piece on a man who sells replicas of worthless stock certificates as *objets d'art*.

The poor housewife is petronized by her cheerful husband, outclassed by her efficient older sister, sidestepped even by her more malleable younger sister. (Whom she wants, incomprehensibly, to take on as a literary collaborator) and gets no more satisfaction out of her two daughters: she cannot communicate with one of them, and the other obeys her so automatically that her allegiance is not worth much. What is equally frustrating, she does not get much of a plot to dominate. After presiding over her annual birthday dinner for her younger sister, she competes for the privilege of giving next year's dinner, and gives it, only to find that even her glamorous job in Alaska. It is enough to drive a housewife mad.

But we are not yet at the heart of *A Think Piece*. Neither the plot nor the characterization has sufficient weight to keep this play from blowing away. Aristotelian, maintaining the precedence

## T.L.S. Children's books

## An English tradition

Humphrey Carpenter

ISABEL QUIGLEY

The Heirs of Tom Brown  
256pp. Chatto and Windus. £8.50.  
0 7011 26159

When in 1917 J. R. R. Tolkien began to write his stories of Middle Earth, he did so with the intention of creating a mythology for the English, apparently on the assumption that they did not already have one; which was true, if "mythology" is assumed to imply Asgard or Olympus. But in fact his enterprise was begun at the heyday of a very powerful myth that was entirely peculiar to the English. It involved neither gods nor giants, but prefects, housemasters, bullies and new boys. In 1917 it was exactly sixty years old, and it had already probably had more direct effect on the character of England than the Eddas did on Iceland.

One perfectly sensible verdict on the English school story is that never has so much been written by so many about so little. Anyone bothering to turn the pages of even a dozen of what Isabel Quigley in *The Heirs of Tom Brown* calls "the central school story"—the type of novel created by Talbot Baines Reed, which flourished in the period before and just after the First World War—will wonder all those authors (Harold Avery, Ounby Hadath, Hynton Cleaver, handfuls more) had the nerve to repeat what was effectively the same plot again and again, year after year. The new boy arrives at the great public school, tries to make his mark, takes a wrong turning and nearly goes to the bad, is rescued just in time, and eventually becomes an outstanding sixth-former. If it was written once it was written a thousand times, and future generations will surely wonder why.

But there is, really, no great mystery about it. Those who attended English public schools as late as 1960 inhabited a world not very far removed from that of Tom Brown: a world of unspeakable food, vast freezing dormitories, homosexual intrigue, extraordinary rules (both official and unofficial), endless compulsory games, and not infrequent beatings. Among the staff there were the stock characters of school stories: the hairy-twenty games types, the sadists, the downtrodden, the aesthetes who scarcely seemed to belong there, the bluff chaplains who loved to talk about sexual problems. It was all just as it had been since *The Loom of Youth*, since *Stalky*, even since *Eric*.

Looking back, one does not find the whole thing entirely credible. It is rather as C. S. Lewis observed of his



The bully Flashman is defeated by Tom and East in Tom Brown's Schooldays.

time in the trenches of the First World War: "It is too cut off from the rest of my experience and often seems to have happened to someone else."

The comparison between the public schools and the Great War is often made. Isabel Quigley shrewdly observes that the war was the very thing for which the schools had unconsciously been preparing their boys for generations. And, she says, no school story should have a sequel carrying its hero into adult life; far better that he should die a brave death the moment the curtain has fallen on his last term. Feathers provided the nearest ending of all. Even more significantly, the experience of boarding-school itself became a kind of Homeric conflict in the memories of those who went through it. Stalky's clever manoeuvres against the natives on the North West Frontier are merely a replay of his schoolboy outrages against the despised master, King. In Auden's words:

"The Great War had begun: but masters' scrutiny And lists of big boys were the war to us . . . And Auden's generation, though they were the first who claimed openly to despise their public schools, drew again and again on the school myth in their verse and prose.

Some day, somebody will probably write a study of the influence of the public schools on the English literary imagination. Isabel Quigley could surely do it very well indeed. But she hasn't yet tried: *The Heirs of Tom Brown* is simply an amble through the history of the school story. "Simply" is scarcely fair, because her book is far

more sophisticated than the run-of-the-mill studies of popular literary genres. In the wisdom of its judgments it measures up easily to E. S. Turner's marvellous *Boys Will Be Boys*, a study of stories for boys which was first published in 1948. It is, perhaps, not quite as funny as it might be, given the absurdity of the subject; even so, there are marvellously comic moments—Hugh Kingsmill observing that Tom Brown, in the sickroom, cradling Arthur's pale delicate face in his strong brown arm, is just like a Victorian husband visiting his wife after childbirth, so that all that remains is for Arthur to hand over the baby. The *Heirs of Tom Brown*, in fact, reads like a series of very accomplished reviews.

It is so good that one wishes it might be better, that there might be some argument or purpose behind this ambling but in the end rather aimless examination of so much tripe. Isabel Quigley is the first to admit that most school stories are tripe, "stunted growths", she calls them, thinner and thinner little slices of trees, sprung from the original and themselves not very sturdy growths of *Tom Brown* and *Eric*: or, *Little By Little*. To *Tom Brown* itself she is merciless, pointing out that Thomas Hughes was too stupid to understand even the teachings of his deeply admired F. D. Maurice in his Christian Socialist days, let alone have the faintest idea what Thomas Arnold had been up to at Rugby. Indeed, she puts much of the blame for the faults of the English public school system on Hughes, who started the *Boys* (she thinks) by glamorizing the tough non-intellectual, with Old Brooke (Tom's house

captain) remarking that he'd rather win school matches than get a Balliol scholarship. Thus was most of Arnold's good work laid waste. Predictably, *Eric* gets less blame: after all, it had few imitators, and Dean Farrar (as Quigley observes) wrote better than Hughes. A chapter, of course, has to be devoted to *Stalky*, and the old controversy about its brutality is aired again, with the wise conclusion that the book is brutal and is good.

The early stuff is got out of the way briskly by Quigley; too briskly, for her statement that "the school story was born with Thomas Hughes" simply isn't true. It existed for more than a century before *Tom Brown*. The first full-length work of English children's fiction, Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or Little Female Academy* (1749), is set in Mrs Teachum's private school for girls, and though its author chose the school setting chiefly as a frame in which to put a number of moral tales told by the girls, their squabbles with each other took up quite a lot of space, and are a recognizable precursor of Angela Brazil. Then there are Charles and Mary Lamb's *Mrs Leicester's School* (1809), an imitation of *The Governess*, and Harriet Martineau's *The Crofton Boys* (1841), not a bad story about a boys' boarding school, and the Revd William Adams's *The Cherry Stones* (1815), a tale of guilty conscience in another establishment for boys, and a handful more, including stories by Maria Edgeworth (who knew a thing or two about boarding-schools from her brothers), and the intriguingly titled but otherwise uninteresting *First Going to School*, or, *The Story of Tom Brown and his Sisters* (1804), by Dorothy Kincaid—did Hughes know of it?

What Hughes did in 1857 was not to invent the school story, or even to create the archetypal plot (the Martineau and Adams stories have a good deal of resemblance to *Tom Brown*), but to attach to it his own muscular, virile little style, which thereafter served it very well. Talbot Baines Reed then modified this—as he put it himself, taking out the powder which Hughes had mixed with the jam—and from his *Fifth Form of St Dominic's* (first printed as a serial in 1881-2) the way was open for any old hack to turn out a clutch of school yarns. Self-parody entered the genre very early, as Quigley points out: not just in *Mike* and the other school stories by the apprentice P. G. Wodehouse (to which Quigley rightly devotes several pages), but in such curiosities as Desmond Coke's *The Banding of a Twig* (1906), which tries, quite unsuccessfully, to show how

different "real" school life is from the books. Charles Hamilton (alias Frank Richards), Owen Conquest, Martin Clifford, et al) capitulated on this self-parodying tendency, and in his *Greyfriars* and *St Jim's* stories produced school tales of such patent absurdity of plot (*Greyfriars Against the Cannibals*! *St Jim's Against the Cannibals*!) as one might think that Quigley rightly uses the word "surrealistic" of them.

If Quigley's book is short-weight on the ancestors of Tom Brown, it is a little skimpy in its treatment of some of his heirs, too. Fair enough to exclude most of the Tullhat Beines Reed imitators (or give them no more than a passing mention), on the grounds that the hooks they write are indistinguishable from one another, but there could have been a little attention paid to such oddities as Nelson Lee, the detective turned schoolmaster, and to the whole subgenre of criminal and outrageous goings-on at the unbelievable schools featured in *Hotsyay* and the other D. C. Thomson story-papers from the 1920s onwards. It becomes apparent, in fact, that Quigley really only wants to write at length about one kind of school story: what she calls the "serious" school novel, though "anti-school" would be just as good a label. Here *The Heirs of Tom Brown* comes into its own, with long and entertaining discussions of Hugh Walpole's *Mr Perrin and Mr Trull* and Alec Vaughn's *The Loom of Youth*, both of which had the unfortunate result of making their authors a reputation with which they could never keep up; and there is a good deal about G. F. Bradby's *The Lanchester Tradition* (1913), an allegory about the decay of the Arnold influence, which, from Quigley's description, sounds fascinating and in need of reissue. Quigley also gives proper space to that oddity, the public school love story (all-male), which, flourishing in the 1890s and a little after, was able to include torrid love-scenes without the authors realizing what they were writing about:

"You you like me better than any other fellow in the school?"  
"Yes, better than any other fellow in the world."  
"Is it possible?"  
"I have always felt that way since—yes—since the very first minute I saw you."

This is from H. A. Vachell's *The Hill*, published as late as 1905, by which time one would have thought that the Wilde scandal ruled out such things.

Quigley accepts unquestioningly, as do most writers about modern children's fiction, that the school story is now dead. Certainly the post-1945

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attempts to adapt the genre to a world of day schools have not often been successful - though books like K. M. Peyton's *Pennington's Seventeenth Summer* (1979) remind us that you don't have to be a teenager to be in permanent conflict with the staff. But Anthony Buckeridge's *Jennings Series*, published over the last three decades, shows not the slightest sign of *vignettes*, while the facsimile *Magpies* issued by the Howard Baker company show that Bunter still has thousands of readers, even if most of them are rather long in the tooth. More seriously, the postwar years have seen that masterpiece by William Mayne *A Swamp in May* (1955), a brilliant evocation of chaf-school life, while

two of the best contemporary English children's authors have made use of the school setting, albeit in an idiosyncratic way - Leon Garfield in *The Strange Affair of Adelaide Harris*, and Jane Gardini in *A Long Way from Verona*, both published in 1971. Tom Brown may have few direct heirs still living, but the more distant branches of the family seem to be flourishing.

## The telling of stories

Margaret Meek

WILLIAM MAYNE  
All the King's Men  
Cape, £5.95,  
0 244 02026 9

After nearly thirty years of tantalizing his readers and putting his critics through their paces, William Mayne challenges us again. Here are three stories that not only help to develop our view of literature for children but also extend the reader's understanding of the reading act itself. Mayne is a fabulist, a storyteller who takes pleasure in the design of his narratives and attempts to find more "subtle" correspondences between the reality that is fiction and the fiction that is reality.

Mayne demands of all his readers both patience and tolerance, slowing down their interaction with his texts so that they can keep pace with the consciousness of his characters:

I am not lost. I know where I am. I don't know where I am is that's all... The two places she thought of being in were Granny's kitchen and her own kitchen, but she was somewhere between, and they were calling her. Lost is where you don't know where here is. It is something to do with here, not something to do with yourself.

I'm not lost. This place doesn't know where it is.

We recognize a Mayne character in Kirsty, who makes her way with two cats in a blizzard to her granny's, on a day that has already included the death of another cat and her grandfather's taking to his bed in a sorrowful dudgeon that has spread ill-temper about the house. The "Stone Ray" of the story's title is also the ancient pile of stones at the top of the fell which Kirsty's grandfather says, "pushed" him as a boy to the far side where the family now lives. The Ray ("a straight line of radiant energy," OED) is used by Kirsty as a sight-line too when she meets a witch-figure in the snow and has to deal with the shape it takes to her imagination. The reader knows what is happening, but is urged to relinquish a hold on the real and take on the child's clearer perception of the truth.

## Curdling the blood

Geoffrey Trease

GILLIAN CROSS  
The Dark Behind the Curtain  
Oxford, £5.95,  
0 19 271457 0

VIVIAN ALCOCK  
The Sylvio Game  
Methuen, £5.50,  
0 416 21930 6

In the child's critical vocabulary "scary" ranks high among the accolades. Gillian Cross promises well from her first page, with schoolboy actor's macabre portrayal of Sweeney Todd - and, let it be said at once, she delivers generously thereafter. The famous melodrama is being rehearsed by Miss Lampeter, a dedicated follower of fashionable theories. She knows all about "total involvement", which she tirelessly and all too tediously demands from her pupils, but she has not the common sense to realize the imprudence of allowing her juvenile demon-babes to wield his grandfather's actual cut-throat razor on stage.

This lad, the clever and monstrous Marshall, dominates the class, at once popular, admired and feared, whereas poor Jackus, school misfit and suspected pilferer, is a reluctant participant, foliated upon a hostile cast for actively remedial and non-artistic reasons. Mysterious occurrences punctuate the rehearsal. Pencil-flying through the air, private possessions vanish, rows of library books cascade from their shelves, pots of scenic paint spill and spread across the floor, lunch

In "Boy to Island" Colin visits the island of Faransay, with its rituals of legend and lore. When he forgets the old piper's warning not to disturb the inhabitants with his novice piping, we know that fairy-tale retribution will follow. The tale has a powerful atmosphere; the reader seems to be offered, even physically, its symbolic properties.

How long they stood it was not possible to tell. They felt as if they had always been there. Then across them came the darkness of the rising, falling moon of that place, spinning and glittering bleakly. And when the darkness had gone they were alone, though together, and out of the gathering of fairs.

The effect of the scenery on the characters is evoked by means of pauses and the use of words such as "bleakly". The reader moves directly to the reaction which is appropriate to the region (all Mayne's stories have inner as well as outer landscapes). The atmosphere in this story seems to recall George MacDonald, as if Mayne were linking his tale to an earlier kind of telling. Perhaps this is how the modern fabulist presents to his readers the continuity of the older, orally derived conventions of time and place in literature, conventions they may not otherwise encounter in these days of realistic fiction.

Passages like this divide Mayne's readers into those who are following where his eye leads, and others whose patience will not last a page. Adults, whose judgment of books for children depends on a swift predictable read of "relevant" plot of theme may be unwilling to admit that children, whose discovery is often slower, could enjoy the expected fall of the phrase. Those who do take the time to read the text discover in Mayne a kind of reading that is a fusion of means and ends, the literary reading that you must do for yourself. And here I think, as Mayne stretches his story to a gossamer thinness and spins out "what happens next", he risks losing all but his most devoted readers in a maze of left-braining sentences and continuous tenses. The Celtic lilt is more affected than affecting to the inexperienced. Even the competent young who read everything have too little time for the re-readings that

reveal the layers of crafting and the "seeing".

The first story on the book "All the King's Men" is quite unexpected in its impact. It seems to have no gaps in the text; all is activity, comings and goings. It is as if Mayne, usually so slow, is showing a turn of speed to shake us out of our preconceptions. Here he exchanges his oblique impressionism for an imitative realism that leaves nothing out. Five dwarfs in the service of a medieval king, whose wife, their protector, has died precede him to his winter hunting palace where they suffer hunger and indignities that outrage their man-sized anger and appetites. When the King appears, it is clear he will marry the red Burgundian Queen who has dwarfs of her own. In the end, however, the dwarfs teach their betters how to behave, as in the best fables, ancient and modern.

The tale moves at the rate of the intrigue. The reader is dealt a full hand of cards and has to learn new rules of the story game. (One of the interior secrets of the story is the card-games dwarfs play.) Yet the pace of the narrative is another illusion. Mayne thickens the text that I, for one, read even more slowly, as the dwarf narrator assumes a point of view the reader has to learn to see from.

Roberto, up on the horse with me, was out of the basket at once, had the very stone the youth had shied, and flung it back, hard, fast, and straight into the still-open laughing mouth. Roberto was at the horse's tail and hauling himself up and into the basket before the youth looked up again after spitting out broken teeth and retching up the stone from his gullet.

It works like Picasso's repainting of Velasquez's "Las Meninas", a crowded canvas of stories within the story, the fabulist's delight in the conventions and boundaries of his craft, to be extended or broken as his skill can advise. Mayne's layering of courtly romance brings storytelling for old and young together again, a game of humour and high seriousness that redefines "literature" as what readers can be taught by writers to read. However we interpret what Mayne does, there is no mistaking his skill in teaching his readers, as the best fabulists have always done, the nature of the art he practises.

sandwiches are disgustingly nibbled by unknown teeth. Jackus seems to be the other children the obvious culprit. Only the reader knows his innocence, and as the author piles on the spookiness and suspense - culminating in a dark footprint in the paint - is led to the inescapable conclusion that these are true psychic phenomena. Marshall has become so totally involved, so convincing an incarnation of bygone evil, that he has stirred up not one poltergeist but a whole pack of restless spirits of exploited Victorian children.

Gillian Cross has a practised hand at producing a delicious frisson. She can curdle the blood and at the same time, paradoxically, send it racing through the veins as the apprehension gathers. Everything is concentrated into a well-wrought plot, a handful of vividly-drawn characters, and a unity of setting, oppressively enclosed. Quite deliberately, one knows she is vague about ages, home backgrounds, and even the type of school, apart from a mention of homework and blazers. This, the young reader is meant to feel, with a nervous glance over his shoulder, could be happening anywhere.

By contrast Vivian Alcock, no less adept at evoking the uncanny, as she demonstrated last year, with that strange, uncomfortably unforgettable time preferred to end with a rational explanation for all the odd incidents she has woven into her story. What, fascination for children of the well-clothed and well-fed, as is often suggested, their own lives are so full of fears and insecurities that they find reassurance in fictional horrors which the characters survive? Insecurity is the

## Self-discoveries

Alan Brownjohn

IAN STRACHAN  
The Soutar Retrospective  
Oxford, £5.95,  
0 19 271464 3

Now she is sixteen years old and her O levels are conveniently over, Kate Soutar can decide for herself, and take up her artist father's invitation to go to Cornwall and help with his retrospective exhibition if she wants to. Kate's home is a tenth floor flat in a tower block, where there is not much romance; and her experience is limited by the watchful eye of a too-protective mother. These parents, Jane and Dan, have been divorced (nothing more colourful than sheer incompatibility) for almost as long as she can remember. To see Dan Soutar properly again will be for Kate a voyage of discovery.

Kate has to be introspective and diffident, and yet capable of resolution, which makes for some awkwardness in the plotting. *The Soutar Retrospective* goes at a fairly leisurely pace through some more believable, and some less believable, incidents once she has arrived in the small Cornish resort where the important retrospective is, somewhat improbably, to be mounted. Kate is, in turn, shocked by her father's ménage with the sophisticated Céline, scarcely older than herself, amused by the god-hearted David (tinkering with old cars between A level and university), mystified by Sir Henry, David's wealthy yet pebbled father, who runs the art gallery, and carried off her feet by Rod, a slightly too bizarre king of the local rocks. But she learns to find her own latent strengths. Ian Strachan's aim appears to be to demonstrate a convincing - and a consoling - process of self-discovery in

his adolescent heroine.

The novel is a brave attempt to reconcile, for "older children", a mature adult capacity to stand back and judge Kate's handling of her dilemmas (the authorial overview) with the real attractions of the dangerous peer group into which she is swept against her will (concession to the readers). This is a tricky balance to keep; but the understanding, here, of an adolescent grappling intelligently, in infinite self-doubt, with the complex surprises of both an adult and a teenage culture, is more than usually subtle.

The relative suddenness of the revelation is credible: by the end, Kate has realized that the past may be discarded and the future faced with a fuller knowledge both of life and of herself. And yet the narrative path to this sensible conclusion follows a tortuous and unlikely route. One fault in the book is its very ambivalence. Mr Strachan gives the impression of wanting to write a moral implication out of almost every carefully-introduced character and episode. The point about loss, loneliness and human interdependence did not require to be underlined so often, nor was there a need to set Kate in so many uneasy dialogues where candid self-assessment is so thoroughly - and banally - pursued. Worse, the succession of contrived exits and entrances by which characters are manoeuvred into the right place at the right time, and a garishly melodramatic climax from which everyone recovers much too quickly and completely, are so implausible as to undermine the message of the story. *The Soutar Retrospective* might appeal, as was no doubt intended, to teenage readers caught between divided parents. Its helpfulness to them will depend on whether they can overlook the weaknesses in the plot and characterization of this honest and well-meaning, yet oddly clumsy, novel.

## Glimpses of the void

Sarah Hayes

ROBERT WESTALL  
Break of Dark  
Chatto and Windus, £5.50,  
0 7011 2624 0

A curious gap exists between novels written specifically for teenagers and those intended for adult consumption - a gap too often filled with the cotton-wool of George Hoyer and Agatha Christie or mashes of the alien, Dennis Wheatley kind. The sinister ingenuity of tale-tellers such as Roald Dahl and Ray Bradbury can attract many readers who have come to an end of "young adult" books; and it is perhaps short stories that most efficiently bridge the teenage gulf.

In his first collection of stories, Robert Westall (*Scarecrows*) shows himself a master of the art of creating eerie presences that can intrude into the sunlight of an ordinary day. His title *Break of Dark* is significant, for in each of the five stories something is heard, seen, or felt to have broken loose from its dark resting place. That is all the stories have in common, for their landscapes, characters and the nature of this breakout are all quite distinct.

In the first story a fell walker finds a beautiful girl with an uneasy nose for money. She makes him a millionaire, using him in return as a stud. In three months she gives birth to golden triplets, and his job done, attempts to kill him. Instead she drives herself, the babies, and a million pounds over a cliff: a population explosion of an alien master race has been held in check, for the moment.

The uneasy friendship of two couples with differing life styles turns to terror when a joke post card calls from the dead a trio of disagreeable relatives. First it is just the smell of Fred, Alice and Aunt Loo, then the sound of asthmatic breathing. It becomes clear that these interlopers are the manifestation of an

unconscious hatred that exists between the two husbands. The reluctant compassion of one only just saves the life of the other and exorcise the ghosts of an unhappy childhood. Another story with more than a whiff of M. R. James about it concerns a keen modern young vicar whose city-centre church is empty of worshippers, except on the night the verger goes to the door of the crypt to admit the congregation.

The longest and most substantial story - more the stuff of novels - is "Blackham's Wimpy", a fine description of the life of a Second World War Wellington bomber crew. The tale is told in the argot of the wireless op - at once dispassionate and free. The desperate need for family reassurance of tale-tellers such as Roald Dahl and Ray Bradbury can attract many readers who have come to an end of "young adult" books; and it is perhaps short stories that most efficiently bridge the teenage gulf.

Robert Westall's robust style and settings have a solidity about them that makes the intrusion from the dark all the more uncomfortable. His fiend story concerns Sergeant Niles, an undemanding sea-front duty. When he tracks down mysterious deaths to a memorial horse trough which appears to absorb objects left in it, he knows he will be the laughing stock of the force. The sergeant makes futile attempts to destroy the horse trough, but his dreams are invaded by silvery aliens and his waking by a great shooting star. "You should have left us alone," he mutters. "Granny-moth's not your sort of place. It's a family resort."

Thin facade of stolid reality and the familiar pettiness of ordinary people just, occasionally cracks to afford a glimpse of the void. Mr Westall is quick to pluck over the crack, but the dark fingers on

## Father figures

Jennifer Moody

JACQUELINE WILSON  
Nobody's Perfect  
Oxford, £5.95,  
0 19 271463 5

TIM KENNEMORE  
Wall of Words  
Faber, £5.25,  
0 571 11856 9

To lose one parent, said Lady Bracknell, may be regarded as a misfortune, but she made no distinction between the loss of a father and the loss of a mother. For a teenage girl, her relationship with her father can be one of the most formative in her life, and his absence may cause much grief. Both Sandra in *Nobody's Perfect* and Kim in *Wall of Words* have, in their different ways, to come to terms with this deprivation. It is interesting that both books take it for granted that it is better to have no father than a weak or inadequate one.

*Nobody's Perfect* is Jacqueline Wilson's first novel, but there is nothing tentative about her choice of theme. Sandra, her shy and awkward fifteen-year-old heroine, is illegitimate and has never known her father. Her mother, who had a hard time bringing Sandra up, has subsequently married the unlikely Stan and produced the apple of Stan's eye, Sandra's step-sister. From a few words of description of her real father, Sandra builds up a fantasy figure of sensitivity and erudition, and she looks forward to the time when the book will be completed and he will return home. The period of *Wall of Words* is the summer holidays. It is a time of events and discoveries: precocious Anna gets herself heard and heard on local radio; Kim's affectionate concern for

uncreative - a middle-aged moneyed advertising executive; of course, having found him she can, and does, dismiss him.

Jacqueline Wilson writes with clarity and perception. She almost manages to overcome the problem of having a first-person heroine, who often behaves with teenage surliness and insensitivity, yet always perceives with tolerance and affection. By far the best part of this book is idiosyncratic Michael: oversized, overtrained, perky and pushy, he is a believable and, against the odds, completely likeable eccentric. That he is the right companion for Sandra, despite disparities of age and size, is soon heartwarming clear, and their bookish activities are entertaining and imaginative. Although the plot is not particularly original and the pace not always maintained, the characters are for the most part convincing and their perplexities real ones.

*Wall of Words* is Tim Kennemore's third novel, and is as different from her first two, *The Middle of the Sandwich* and *The Fortunate Few*, as they are unlike each other. More ambitious in scope, more complex in plot, *Wall of Words* is about a family of four daughters, the youngest seven-year-old Anna, Kerry, Frances and heroine Kim, the eldest, aged thirteen. Their confident, outgoing mother works to support them, as their father has moved away from the family while he writes a block-busting novel set in Russia. His daughters visit him from time to time and he them, if he remembers. Kim adores her father, a caring with him many interests and a turn of mind, and she looks forward to the time when the book will be completed and he will return home. The period of *Wall of Words* is the summer holidays. It is a time of events and discoveries: precocious Anna gets herself heard and heard on local radio; Kim's affectionate concern for

Kerry's school phobia is resolved when Kerry is diagnosed as dyslexic; finally, Kim becomes sadly aware that her father will never return. He has never completed anything in his life, has never faced responsibility and is not wanted back by his wife.

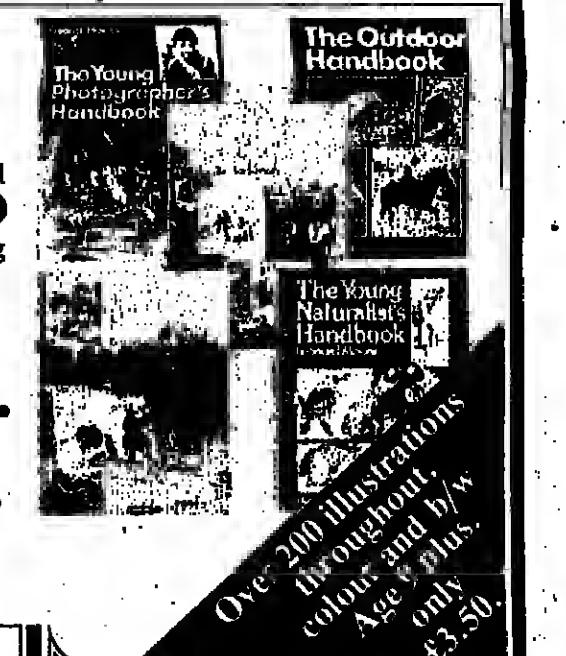
Ms Kennemore has a light and entertaining style, only occasionally marred by facetiousness, and she catches neatly the warmth and tensions of a close-knit family life. The monstrous Anna is perhaps treated with more tolerance than one might expect, but generally the girls wrangle and care for each other in a pleasantly recognizable fashion. The only factor that jars in an otherwise very enjoyable book is the conspicuousness of the "public information" content. For example, the symptoms and treatment of dyslexia, the need for respect as well as love in a relationship, the importance of not having children in order to cement an uneasy marriage, are all spoken of in terms that do not seem appropriate to the person saying them. One has an uneasy feeling that one is being preached at, especially as, with the exception of Kerry's dyslexia, none of the didactic points made is in any way intrinsic to the plot. The reader may raise an eyebrow too at the apparent valuation of a genius-level IQ as nothing more than the means of coming second in class in all subjects with very little effort.

*Young Writers 33rd Year* (1980pp, Heinemann, Paperback £2.95, 0 435 13412 4) contains thirty-three of the award-winning entries from the 1981 W. E. Smith Young Writers' Competition. The competition, which was previously known as the Children's Literary Competition has been held annually since 1959. It invites poems, short stories and descriptive pieces from young writers under sixteen. This collection is illustrated by drawings and paintings by children.

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An illustration from *The Hells of Tom Brown* by Isabel Quigly, which is reviewed above.

## Horrid tales

Edward Blishen

JOAN AIKEN  
A Whisper in the Night  
Gollancz, £5.95,  
0 575 0310 5 0

I see an ominous sort of clearing in the literary forest, and a hut in it. There's someone sitting in the small garden typist at an amazing pace. Gothic Tales Written While You Wait, says a neat notice on a pole. Keeping the kind of careful distance that characters in her stories don't (almost all of them being rooted in some simple absence of caution, some tendency to rush into plainly haunted valleys or obviously untrustworthy sorts of graveyard), I become quickly convinced that the typist is Joan Aiken. No one I can think of turns out more agreeable little horrid tales. A reviewer once spoke of her trade, or this corner of it, as the chilling of teenage spines. My spine is much older than that, but she can always bring about some reduction in its temperature.

There are (of course) thirteen "stories of horror, suspense and fantasy" in *A Whisper in the Night*. Some are simple tales of revenge, of a fairly stark and full-blooded kind. So the punishment of the unpleasant maths teacher, Miss Evans, is nothing less than death brought about, in some manner best thought of as a sort of gurgling, by Old Philkin, who's defined by a vague suggestion of hopping and stopping and who might be, but probably isn't, a hairy frog with the texture of a rotten pear. Relief will be given by this story to any imaginative child beset by any unimaginative instructor. Indeed, fantasies of justified punishment carried out by barely definable agents make up a large part of the volume. Joan Aiken has a gift for inventing such agents: it lies in her ability to suggest a hideously specific vagueness. In one story a beastly husband gets his come-uppence from an emanation more beastly than himself: it's a sort of bear, but in fact the whole environment, the entire atmosphere, becomes furiously, crushingly bearish. There's also much use of the idea of an apparently good thing turning into a startlingly bad one: for example, *The Finder*, a metal image that certainly helps an odious schoolboy to track down small treasures that have been fished from him, but also finds him: which amounts to his being extracted from the world of the living by way of an impossibly tiny lavatory window.

Occasionally a tale is clearly beyond



## Beyond childhood

David Rees

AIDAN CHAMBERS  
Dance on my Grave  
Bodley Head, £4.25.  
0 370 30366 0

The immediate questions that come to mind after reading this book are: for whom is it intended, and who is writing it? Like the same author's *Breaktime* it is, linguistically, an adult novel of some difficulty – a piece of verbal fireworks (Zindel out of Salinger, anglicized, with touches of Dylan Thomas) that I, personally, found irritating and self-indulgent, though others will, no doubt, praise it as dazzling and breath-taking. No sixteen-year-old (it is a first-person narrative) ever spoke with such mature precision, so many up literary quotations, so many felicitous puns: it is Aidan Chambers's voice, not that of his central character, who, incidentally, has the same voice as the second main character – no attempt is made in the dialogue to distinguish between Barry and Iain, whose speech is tiresomely unimpaired, all clever repartee, quotes and bits of quotes and misplaced American-derived slang. It is likely to be beyond ninety-nine per cent of the teenage readers for whom it is presumably intended.

The subject matter is also a problem. It is the story of a love affair between two people of the same sex, and although there are some coy sexual euphemisms that no gay person would ever use, Aidan Chambers is not afraid to describe what happens in bed. Well, I thoroughly welcome a novel for and about homosexual or bisexual teenagers, because it is time this most ignored and taboo of subjects had a proper place in young adult literature. The middle section of the book is extremely well done. The intensity and

passion of Hal's feelings for and commitment to Barry are vivid and real, and equally convincing is Hal's rage and sense of let-down when he realizes that Barry has spent the night with a Norwegian au pair girl, that his lover wants something a lot more casual than he can offer. And good, too, is the fact that while writing about homosexual love the author does not neglect sex (as Deborah Hautzig did in *Hey, Dollface!*). But the subject matter makes one wonder who is going to read this book? It should have a place on the shelves of every secondary school library, but I doubt very much that it will. Homosexuality still makes too many teachers wonder what the parents will think. My own novel *In the Tent* provides a useful illustration – not thought by any school library in Cornwall, in Somerset kept under lock key, in some London schools available only to sixth-formers. Yet it has sold pretty well in gay bookshops and through the mail order pages of *Gay News*, which is probably what will happen to *Dance on my Grave*.

The rest of the novel is nothing like as good as the middle section. The minor characters are two-dimensional cut-nuts or caricatures, and much of the story-line is wildly improbable. Hal disguised as a girl going to view Barry's corpse in the morgue – Barry, after the final quarrel, is killed in a motor-bike accident – and being unmasked, indeed, practically undressed in a fight with the morgue attendant, is one of many scenes that are way over the top. Buried somewhere in this book is an excellent novel, but, as in *Breaktime*, Aidan Chambers doesn't seem to understand the word excess. *Dance on my Grave* is all too often hysterical, at times verging on the grotesque, and in incident a great pity, because with a more self-critical, cooler approach it could have been first-rate.

David Rees's *The Milkmaid's* on his way has recently been published by the Gay Man's Press £2.50. 0 907 040 12 8.

## Undiluted apprehension

Patricia Craig

NINA BAWDEN  
Kept in the Dark  
Gollancz, £5.50.  
0 575 03113 1

The domestic emergency, usually involving illness in a parent, is a standard device in juvenile fiction for getting the children of the family into an unaccustomed setting where alarms and misadventures can suitably occur. The leading characters are often parked on eccentric relatives whom, due to some long-standing estrangement, they now meet for the first time. A runaway daughter, an advantageous marriage, and pig-headedness on the part of one or both her parents, will likely emerge as the causes of the old family quarrel. The daughter, the mother of the present set of children, will have taken up with someone unsuitable, in the rigid parents' view, on account of his profession (artistic) and financial prospects (poor). She will have made her bed, and never regretted lying on it. Nothing but desperation will now bring her to ask a favour – child-minding – of the unrelenting old pair.

The grandparents, however, will prove less unrelenting than their behaviour over the years has suggested. It will be up to the children

to endear themselves to the standoffish old couple, in the interest of reconciliation and prospective emotional expansiveness. They may do this by means of cuteness (though this particular trait has no credibility for a present-day readership), adaptability, resourcefulness or an unapologetic spirit. Whatever the requisite quality, they will manifest it in the course of coping with some further emergency or bother which afflicts the grandparents in their turn. Things, after some close shaves and unanticipated pickles, will end satisfactorily for everyone.

Nina Bawden, who took a different story-book plot (the father wrongly accused of theft) and used it to exceptionally good effect in *The Peppermint Pig*, now does the best she can with the unoriginal incident outlined above. She has several advantages over earlier users of this particular plot – terseness, edginess, scorn for the highly artificial dangers to which children in books were traditionally exposed. The danger that looms over inoffensive Noel, stormy Clara and posing Bosie (who plays the baby and the family chef as it suits him) in *Kept in the Dark* is genuine enough, and the author makes no bones about it, communicating a thoroughly undiluted sense of apprehension, rising at another grandparent, David, a fat young man, stupid and at the point of psychopathy, who imposes himself on the household. David's threatening friendliness is not to be resisted. The

children, taken in at first, and guilty of some significant indiscretions, are soon pandering to their cousin's insane relish for happy family life – for the old people's sake, of course, as much as their own.

There are some inconsistencies in the book, and some implausibilities too. The grandparents are really less eccentric than unlikely (he gruff but not altogether unbending, she wise and flighty) – and would they really have kept their daughter in ignorance, all her life, of the existence of her half-brother (David's father)? David is a satisfactorily frightening figure, because of his unpredictability and constant need of placation; but we are kept quite in the dark about how he manages to survive on his own (his visits to his grandparents are relatively infrequent). Nina Bawden is too accomplished an author to write anything resembling "case-history" stories, but in this novel there are one or two gestures in that direction. "Social problem" fiction is all very well, but it is really necessary to lumber poor Bosie with so unpalatable a defect as thieving – safely in the past or not? ("I stopped stealing last year... On my birthday", he rather pertly announces). And did the author have to involve him in an escapade that verges on delinquency in order to effect a suitable outcome for her story? These are trifling obstacles in an exhilarating course, but they get in the way of complete enjoyment of the narrative.

## Cultures on other terms

Dominic Hibberd

MALCOLM J. BOSSE  
Ganesh  
Chatto and Windus, £5.50.  
0 7011 2621 3

As numerous exhibitions in Britain are at present reminding us, it is time we took India on her own terms. Inner strength is one of the things Indians believe they can teach us, but Hinduism is hard to take seriously at first, with its bizarre gods and infinite confusion. Malcolm Bosse's book offers a way of approach. Take Ganesh, for example, the fat, rather Platonic elephant-headed god: it is hard to believe that many Indians venerate this extraordinary figure. Yet he is the Overcomer of obstacles; a little reverence to him might be worth trying. It might even make the authorities route the new bypass through the hamburger drive-in instead of through Jeffrey's family

home. Or perhaps the little bronze idol which he brought with him from India is no more powerful than the iron weathercock which his great-grandfather placed on the house long ago; two symbols from two very different cultures but each signifying the continuity and strength of human values. Jeffrey acknowledges them both.

In some ways, *Ganesh* is a standard story about a fourteen-year-old loner who has to settle into a new school, but it has some interesting variations. The first third of the book is set in south India, where Jeffrey's American parents have devoted their lives to helping the poor. When the narrative opens, his mother is dead and his father is dying. There are informative descriptions of Indian life and customs, culminating in a grim cremation which Jeffrey insists on watching, an unconventional act which marks him out as an alien in the country he had believed to be his own. He then goes to America, where his aunt still lives in the old family house; the spiritual depth of India meets the strengths of the New World. With his Indian

mannarisms, he is regarded as an oddity at first, but by the time the threat to the house comes he has won a few friends. Under his trained guidance, they mount a hunger-strike, not the messy game it tends to be in the West but a discipline regulated by the principles of Yoga. The power which, according to Bosse, drove the British from India, proves strong enough to win this smaller battle.

This is an absorbing book, written without frills by an American who knows and respects India (the inappropriate mosque on the dust jacket may not be his fault). A Midwest high school kid who read it attentively would see himself in perspective and would get more than a glimpse of the philosophical riches of India. For British readers there is the bonus of encountering life in small-town America. Too many children's books condemn the materialism of modern culture and offer no alternative; this one neither condemns nor urges alternatives but brings the ancient message that strength comes from within, whatever culture you happen to belong to.

## Partaking

Elaine Moss

MARY MELWOOD  
The Watcher Bee  
Deutsch, £4.50.  
0 233 974 32 6

Mary Melwood, as a writer for young people, is an anachronism. Her second novel (following the extraordinary *Nettlewood*, which was published in 1974) confirms my belief that she is one of the most gifted authors to emerge in the field in the last twenty years and that her publisher has done us all a huge favour by bravely publishing in 1982 a long, romantic, calmly observed story about growing up. True, the growing up is set in the 1930s; but do human pain and puzzlement, awkwardness and fantasy, calf love and emergence into adulthood change as the decades roll by? Or are these experiences eternal virtues? Mary Melwood persuades us that they are. And I am convinced that *The Watcher Bee* will prove that teenagers can still be absorbed in long novels and novels of a non-parental nature (if such novels are written with honesty, humour and sharp awareness of the quirks of human society).

Kate, an orphan, is lovingly cared for by an uncle and by an aunt who is the proud registrar of their little Nottinghamshire village. The family is not monied but respectable. "What we were wasn't called 'poor'", says Kate. "It was called 'careful' and was regarded as a virtue." But when beautiful daughter Zoe comes to take refuge from high society in Kate's village they disturb the values of the community. Kate, seeing her lifelong friend and teasing challenger, Charlie, the boy-next-door, succumb to Zoe's charms remembers ruefully Ueno's rhyme in which, as a child, she had

misinterpreted the last word: "Let me a partaker, not a watcher be" – whence the title. For the book is about Kate, painfully – yet humorously, atotically, philosophically – casting off the role of "watcher bee" and emerging, clever, positive and sometimes ill at ease, into a full "partaker".

Mary Melwood's direct unvarnished style reminds one of Flora Thompson's *Larkrise to Candleford* or Spike Mays's *Reuben's Corner*, for although *The Watcher Bee* is a novel not an autobiography, it springs from the same vein of honest recollection of a rural way of life no longer with us.

*Children's Books: An Information Guide* is a new handbook containing information about the children's book world, for parents, teachers and librarians. It provides information about: trade and professional organizations; book fairs and awards; prizes in Britain and gives advice about buying books. The guide costs £1.70 and is available from the Centre for Children's Books, National Book League, Book House, 45 East Hill, London, SW18 2ZZ. The Centre for Children's Books also publishes an annotated list of authors and

## Rain dancers

Galen Strawson

JAN MARK  
Aquarius  
Kestrel, £5.95.  
0 7226 57935

Viner is the aquanaut of *Aquarius* – the water-binger. But his name, a shortening of "water diver", is little more than a term of abuse in the misty, sodden village where he grows to manhood, where gross grows in the sheep's wool and the people are nicknamed the Webfeet.

Universally reviled, Viner dreams of a place where his diving skills might be of some use. A traveller raises his hopes, telling of a land where water is prized and the king must dance for rain; and one wet dawn he slips away from the village, taking the path that not a traveller ever takes, "Over the Top" and out of the mist and rain, into the sun and a series of troubles and trials – that eventually lead him to the palace of the Rain King the traveller told of, a king whose name is Morning Light.

In that land a man becomes king by proving his ability to make rain by dancing. Morning Light first danced two years ago, and the palace courtyard was under water before he was done; he was wed to the queen before the week was out. But that was two years ago, and it has hardly rained since, despite his daily dancing. Viner comes into his own, plotting the course of subterranean streams, detecting the best sites for new wells, proceeding like a saviour round the villages and towns of the realm.

And then the complications begin. The queen bears a daughter, and many in the palace want her to marry Viner straightaway, making him king and dispensing with the ineffectual Morning Light. Viner is ambivalent, wanting the crown but attached to Morning Light – indeed he appears to

be half in love with him. Various plans are hatched and bungled, and the complications complicate. Viner and Morning Light end up on the run with Morning Light's baby daughter and a few not very firm friends.

Viner has grasped Morning Light's true nature. He is not only not a rain dancer, he is the cause of the drought upon the land; his dancing puts the clouds to flight. Clearly he belongs down in Viner's dank village, just as Viner belongs in the palace of the rain king, Viner intends to get him there by hook or by crook, and by hook and crook he does so, mercilessly exploiting his love for his daughter.

This is a well-made tale on the whole, with much good descriptive detail, good overall structure and some nicely humorous effects, especially early on. But the ending is unsatisfactory; there is too much bad blood between Viner and Morning Light to identify with, inspiring neither liking, nor sympathy, nor respect. His occasional good impulses are just that – impulses, and both he and Morning Light are implausibly childish, sulky, thoughtless and ungracious. It would, certainly, be very dull if all children's stories were morally as black and white as *The Lord of the Rings*, but Viner's positively neurotic changes of mood prevent one from forming any sense of him as a real person. Altogether he is a very strange character to find in a children's story.

Nevertheless, the basic idea of *Aquarius* is a good one; there are some compelling moments. Perhaps the best indication of how good it is is the disappointment one feels when Jan Mark does not make more of Viner's aquanaut progress round the parched realms of the rain king; one very much wants to hear more about the diving and the digging, the first water in the desperate trenches, the dry-lipped peasant astonishment, the wells and the gratitude; this is an opportunity missed.

## Nowhere Bear

I'm a nowhere bear, a threadbare bear  
A rumed bruin, Monsieur Misro  
With a moth-aatan coat, a buttony stare  
And a blast of a growl that's beyond repair.  
Oh it isn't fair, it isn't fair,  
I have my pride and I do still care  
That I soan rather less than dabonair.  
So my only hope is I'll find somewhere  
Before I surrender at last to despair  
An old acquaintance, some kind confrère  
From the days when we both had a lot more hair,  
Who will take me up in his arms and declare –  
You're a still very cuddly nowhere bear.

John Mole

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Tom Shippey

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0 86203 069 2

H. M. HOOVER

This Time of Darkness  
Methuen, £5.50.  
0 416 21770 2

"As one who long in populous city pent... Milton's line describes the heroines of both these books. Lisa escape, in Monica Hughes's *Ring-Rise Ring-Set*, is from the city of the Techs, where she is first discovered slitting down the winter shutters which will keep out the cold (and the short daylight) of the new Ice Age creeping down on Canada; the world she escapes to is that of the Eskimos, or Ekoes as her people call them, who live in more natural style. Amy, in H. M. Hoover's *This Time of Darkness*, is in worse plight, both physically and emotionally, for the rain she thinks she hears on page one is only a broken pipe up-level, and when she wins through after many trials to the fabulous "level eight", she finds that it is only a more comfortable cell of a mental prison, inhabited by adults who still say "There is no beyond... I'm old and I know".

## Modes and modules

Colin Greenland

JAMILA GAVIN

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Methuen, £3.95.  
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NICHOLAS FISK

Sweets From a Stranger and other SF stories  
Kestrel, £4.95.  
0 7226 5759 5

ROBERT SWINDELLS

The Wheaton Book of Science Fiction Stories  
Wheaton, £3.95.  
0 08 026425 5

Science fiction and the supernatural are modes of writing that displace, defy and unsettle reality. They entertain the mind by entertaining possibilities of extension. There is another world behind the wall, there is another society at the bottom of the rubbish chute, there is a past which remains in the present. With the current dominance of social realism in children's fiction such fantasies may seem not quite the thing, but their extra dimension can allow a good look beyond the old confines of the nursery, to the tenth-floor flat. In Jamila Gavin's "Over-The-Log" black

However she too breaks out, and the land she breaks out to is also a paradise where people work with hands not brains, and all purposes are clear.

Rebellion against the way things are? Wish-fulfilment for city children? The two books are different enough to evade the charge of "formula" writing. *Ring-Rise Ring-Set* is for the strategy of having a heroine whom it is rather hard to like. At times she is just the naughtiest girl in the school, for ever borrowing hair-ribbons and having people say "Really, Lizzi!" This escalates, though, to a neatly-drawn adolescent selfishness, as she wheedles John the Tech into allowing her how to hide in an expedition sled, and – after being stranded on the ice – does the same to Namoonic the Eko to bring her back. We are asked, just the same, to forgive her carelessness for her generosity; and this is where the book's ambition shows and fails. The big scenes are where Lisa faces up to the authorities of her world and tells them they must not melt the snow and destroy the Ekoes' habitat just to keep the Northern hemisphere free of ice. There must be another way; the scientist will have to "look a little harder". There is something naive in this assumption that all problems have nice answers. Science fiction ought to do better than pony stories.

*This Time of Darkness* is less relaxed. Its heroine, Amy, has learnt

not to be naughty because the camera always sees and the computer records. She is careful to score "mid-normal" in the tests in the learning centre, she never finishes first, and when she emerges to the streets of rats, grimo and crazies, she knows how to avoid attention. She can do one thing, though, which she shouldn't, and that is read. Ms Hoover writes like someone who has seen the predictions about programmed learning and found them profoundly unconvincing. In several scenes she shows Amy's literacy carrying her through by giving her free access to information; Amy carries away with her Axel, the boy whose contribution is certain knowledge that in spite of what the computers say there is a world outside.

This book's theme, indeed, is how information degenerates with time and transmission; the trouble is not what people don't know, it's what they do know that's just plain wrong. It is a useful idea for anyone to grasp, and dramatized well in scenes of successive breakdown, whether from the casual pursuit of the lower levels, the impersonal politeness of the city's inflexible, stupid computers, or the devolved crazies of the surface. *This Time of Darkness* could be compared with Wells's *Time Machine*; in it the Morlocks escape. This is good science fiction at any level, making only the appropriate concessions for young readers.

Charlie jumps off a swing at the bomb-site and finds himself back at the mansion that used to stand there. The morchant's children take him for a runaway slave. Gavin's visionary protagonists inhabit an England of transience and urban decay, but compared with the poverty of India or the horror of the Second World War, their environment is presented as quite comfortable, even friendly. In these stories imbalances are redressed, losses restored, so that, although her scope is wide, Gavin's world seems strangely circumscribed.

The children in Nicholas Fisk's stories are loudly and firmly embodied in their cultures, but Fisk is less interested than Gavin in environments. Instead, he uses the equipment of SF, the robots, dream-machines and aliens (hostile or angelic), to exercise the sympathetic imagination by expressing how things look from the other side. An alien victim whose keepers supply the wrong sorts of food and air; a defective robot which comes to understand that its owner's daughter is tormenting it; a collosy of video-games which adorns their player because he is "so in Circuit" with them: SF is full of these shiny surfaces, and Fisk exploits them all. His reflections are as moral as Gavin's though less didactic. He demonstrates that being good or even being crafty can get you nowhere, while success can be the result of more luck or sheer aggression. Fisk's images

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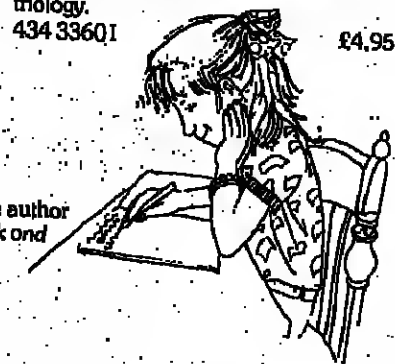
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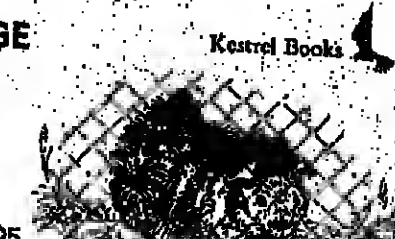


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## Encouraging the excellent

Ann Martin

It is a rare child who from the beginning has a strong natural inclination for the excellent: a sense of the beautiful either in words or sounds or pictures can only be fostered by careful encouragement, in the same way as a sense of morality. It is fatal in both cases to make this educational diet unpalatable; either too consciously worthy or, as so often, just plain dull. Picture books can play an important part in growing up, stretching a young child's visual and aural imagination and appreciation from an early age. But earnest adults should beware of books which appeal only to them and should not be beguiled by an overclever text, or paintings that suit their own taste, into buying a book that fails in its appeal to a child who needs a good story to flavour the message.

When it comes to story telling, Hans Andersen must, of course, win hands down, even if the retelling misses something of his magical qualities. Romance and suffering are strong ingredients in *The Wild Swans*, the tale of Elise and her bewitched brothers, who need shirts woven out of nettles before they can be turned again to human form. At the age of eight or thereabouts the lavish pictures, although enjoyed and studied (especially the ghoul in the churchyard where Elise picks the nettles), are scarcely needed, but a younger child would certainly gain extra stimulation from their delicate splendour. This is a worthwhile book for the young reader but sometimes one does feel the money might be better spent on a complete paperback Andersen.

Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat is by now too well known to need much introduction. Here it is

again, this time with all the words written down and most comically illustrated by Quentin Blake, who has obviously enjoyed the exercise. Although my heart sank slightly when I first saw what seemed to be yet another money-making spin-off, I found this particular version impossible to resist.

Another book noticeable for the quality of its writing is *Babylon*, a gentle tale which is also thought-provoking. Much is left unsaid and merely evoked. Three little black children find their way to the top of a deserted railway viaduct and explore the flowery wilderness they find there, with its glimpses into back gardens and wetty reflections in the canal below. Meanwhile two of them reminisce about the life left behind to come to England. There are plenty of straightforward pictures help the story along but it is a pity that the song which is the book's inspiration has not been set down somewhere complete with music, for the benefit of those who do not know it.

At present Australia seems to be the source of a quantity of children's books, albeit of varying quality. This time the five on offer are all worth a second - or even a third - glance. Most attractive is perhaps *The Train to Bondi Beach*. Watercolour paintings, redolent of the 1930s, illustrate this simple but appealing tale of a little boy in a pre-war seaside town who yearns to be old enough to sell papers to the tram passengers. The evocative style of the delightful illustrations, well matched by the text, may first attract adults but they would be more than justified in buying this book for their children. The hero in *Mary Moves to the Country* is reluctant to leave town for an isolated farm: to make matters worse, he finds himself the only boy in his class at the small local school. He has the all-too-frequent nine year old's distaste for girls, but when he discovers that one of them rides around on a motor bike and

beats him at skateboarding, his opinion changes; all ends well and the moral is neatly, if tritely, pointed. The pen and watercolour pictures are predominantly in shades of brown and blue, nicely humorous and pretty to look at.

The next three volumes have the same author and illustrator; each story is told in cheerful doggerel and the pages are covered with drawings in a gentle tale which is also thought-provoking. Much is left unsaid and merely evoked. Three little black children find their way to the top of a deserted railway viaduct and explore the flowery wilderness they find there, with its glimpses into back gardens and wetty reflections in the canal below. Meanwhile two of them reminisce about the life left behind to come to England. There are plenty of straightforward pictures help the story along but it is a pity that the song which is the book's inspiration has not been set down somewhere complete with music, for the benefit of those who do not know it.

The last two of this particular bunch are of more dubious quality. A young child would enjoy the clear colours and flat native style of the pictures in *The Birds' Wedding*, irreverent in its rhyme that accompanies it, which is a second-rate "Who killed Cook Robin?" Children may enjoy the sentimentality of *The Kind Wolf*, although for an adult this saccharine tale of a wolf who only wants to do the other animals but has first to overcome their natural suspicions is irritating, breaking the cardinal rule of using the animal's real nature to motivate the action: it is unredempted by the pleasant but ordinary pictures.

The irrational oneness of *Selma, the Mouse and the Giant Cat* is a different matter. In this case the pretty catfishing (the technique is well and carefully explained at the end) deserve a better story. As for *Peggy the Horse*, this dreary whinny is presumably supposed to be an imaginative fantasy. Why, bother to import a book like this? German picture books are of varying quality but this is the worst I have come across so far.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN: *The Wild Swans*. Retold by Amy Ehrlich. Illustrated by Susan Jeffers. Macmillan. £4.95. 0 333 32659 8.

TIM RICE and ANDREW LLOYD WEBBER: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Illustrated by Quentin Blake. Pavilion Books. £4.95. 0 907516 02 5.

JILL PATON WALKER: *Babylon*. Illustrated by Jennifer Northway. André Deutsch. £4.95. 0 235 97362 1.

KATE WALKER: *Mary Moves to the Country*. Illustrated by Lucy Meredith. Methuen. £3.50. 0 454 002122.

ELIZABETH HATHORN: *The Train to Bondi Beach*. Illustrated by Julie Vivins. Methuen. £4.50. 0 454 00266 1.

RAYMOND SMITH and HENRY SCHONHEIMER: *Susan Shouted Shark, Dreadful David Lee, Greedy Gullon Gull*. Hutchinson. £3.95 each. 0 09 137500 2, 0 09 137490 1, 0 09 137510 X.

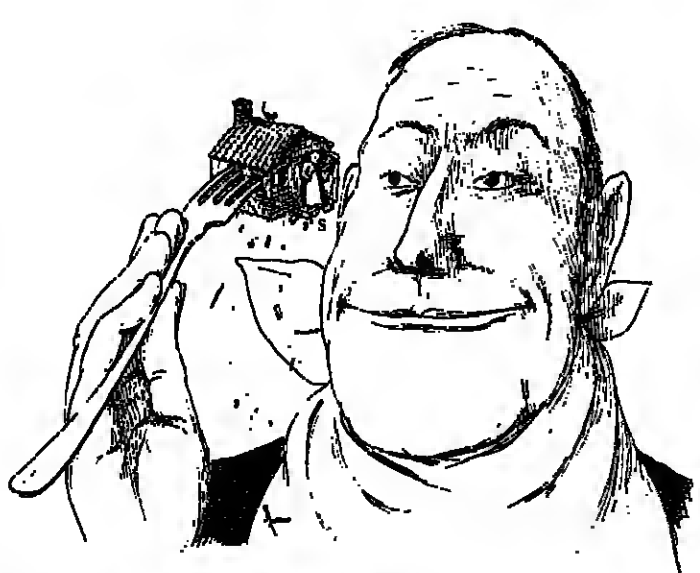
*The Birds' Wedding*. Adapted and translated by Lucy Meredith. Illustrated by Masako Matsumura. Faber. £4.25. 0 571 11896 8.

PETER NICKL: *The Story of the Kind Wolf*. Retold by Marion Koenig. Illustrated by Josef Wilkoff. Faber. £4.25. 0 571 11897 6.

SUSI BOHALL: *Selma, the Mouse and the Giant Cat*. Translated by Lucy Meredith. Faber. £3.95. 0 571 11855 0.

ANGELIKA KAUFMANN and FRIEDRICH MAYROCKER: *Peggy the Horse*. A. and C. Black. £3.95. 0 907234 14 3.

This paperback edition of Kit Williams's *Maskerade*, which has recently been published by Jonathan Cape (£1.50. 0 224 02937 1), has an introduction by the author which recounts the story of the hiding and finding of the treasure; it also provides a photograph of the hiding place and the answers to the clues in the original edition.



One of Erik Blegvad's illustrations to *The Parrot in the Garret*, which is reviewed below.

## A sense of place

John Mole

ERIK and LENORE BLEGVAD

*The Parrot in the Garret*  
Julia MacRae Books. £3.95.  
0 86203 049 8

This parrot is a magpie, and its bright pickings are from the chests of several popular treasures: twenty-six traditional rhymes about dwellings, most of them familiar and well-loved. Nestle, wells, a basin of water, the moon (of course) and a variety of curious houses. The ubiquitous Old Woman presides - In her shoe, her coal-scuttle, under the hill (you never ask which bill in a nursery rhyme), and, most disquieting, meeting a fete as terrible and final as her name:

There was an old woman called Nothing,  
Who rejoiced in a dwelling exceedingly small;  
A man stretched his mouth to its utmost extent,  
And down at one gulp house and old woman went.

*The Parrot in the Garret* is a delightful enterprise. It's properly haunted, not least by the Ghost of Picture Book Past. Each little evant is framed on its page, colour washes alternating with line drawings of needle-thin delicacy. There's a touch of the sampler about them, almost as if they might hang on the walls of Poll's garret as he sits alone, robbed of his toast and tea, and contemplates domestic bliss:

A little brown bird built a little brown nest  
Up in a shady tree,  
And to it there lived his little brown wife  
Once upon a time. If only...

Erik Blegvad has illustrated this one marvellously, with the perfect blend of whimsy and terror; the cosy cottage transfixed by the prongs of a fork and just about to enter the not-yet-opened mouth of a grinning gorgon, the old woman has opened the door at eye-level with her devourer, the walls are already disintegrating, and on the roof a minute cat stands with its tail erect in fear. You can almost hear it hissing.

## Creatures

The butterfly, alive inside a box,  
Beats with its powdered wings to soundless knocks  
And wishes polythene were hollyhocks.

The beetle clambering across the road  
Appears to find his body quite a load;  
My fingers meddle with his highway code

And slugs are rescued from the fatal hiss  
Of tyres that hiss like slithering liquorice  
On zigzagged liquorice, but sometimes miss.

Two snails are raced across a glistening stone  
(Each eye thrust forward like a microphone)  
So slowly that the winner is unknown.

To all these little creatures I collect  
I mean no cruelty or disrespect  
Although their day-by-day routine is wrecked.

They may remember their experience,  
Though at the time it made no sort of sense,  
And treat it with a kind of reverence.

It may be something that they never mention,  
An episode outside their apprehension,  
Like some predestined intervention.

John Fuller

## Earthy couplets

Andrew Hislop

ROALD DAHL

*Revolting Rhymes*  
Quentin Blake.  
Cape. £3.95.  
0 224 02932 0

*Revolting Rhymes* is not a title to seduce the more picky of parents who police their children's cultural intake. Nor will Roald Dahl's verse mutations of classic fairytales please the purists who like their Grimm, Jacobs and Perrault unadulterated, still less sent up, turned inside out and brought down to the earthy in couplets. And those who are not particularly partial to having their noses rubbed in doggerel might well wince at the pedestrian trite to beor snouts with which young Goldilocks decorates Ursa Minor's bunk:

Worse still, upon the head of one  
Was something that a dog had done.  
I saw once more, what would you think  
I all this horrid dirt and stink  
Was smeared upon your cinderdown  
By this revolting little clown?

These rhymes, though, are rarely really revolting. In the playground-sultry sense of the word. They toy with tradition rather than muscle their way beyond the bounds of decency. "Cinderella" offers a rich diet of blood and guts ("I guess you think you know this story/You don't. The real one's much more gory.") but it is hardly strong meat compared with what now passes for (and succeeds as) entertainment for children. A few people get their heads chopped off by the deceptively inclined prince whom Cinderella ditches for a jam-maker. (Anyway, one of the Ugly Sisters - "The one whose face was blotched with blisters" - had flushed the original slipper down the loo so he cobbled-together coupling with royalty had already started on the wrong foot.) Prudence is also muted. Cinders, when the prince grabs her dress as midnight strikes, is reduced to her underwear. Little Red Riding Hood "whips a pistol from her knickers" to blast her lupine aggressor into a wolfskin coat, then repeats the trick when making a guest appearance in Dahl's revamped version of "The Three Little Pigs", only this time the trigger-happy heroine bags a pigskin travelling case as well as more big bad winter wear.

And far from adding dirt to "Jack and the Beanstalk", this curious tale, written before our entry into the Common Market and the advent of the green pound, which tells how a burgeoning mountain of uneaten agricultural produce can be turned into gold, now becomes a veritable parable of the life-preserving qualities of penicillin. Jack, realizing that the pest's ability to distinguish our national copiousness from lethal consequences ("By Christopher!")

leek cried. "By gum! The Giant's eaten up my mum!" He scrubs all essence of England from his pores. The giant deprived of all whiff of humanity can only mutter: "FE FI FO FUM! RIGHT NOW I CAN'T SMELL ANYONE!" "A bath", remarks the enriched Jack, "does seem to pay! I'm going to have one every day."

And as for "Goldilocks", Dahl is positively missionary in advocating a need for moral revision of the old version mouthed down to us through the years by mother.

This famous wicked little tale should never have been put on sale. It is a mystery to me. Why loving parents cannot see that this is actually a book about a brazen little crook.

Far from allowing his Goldilocks to get off scot-free, Dahl ends his tale with Big Bear telling Baby Bear that if he wishes to eat his porridge he will have to consume the porridge hussy as well for there lies his breakfast.

*Revolting Rhymes* is in fact pure pleasure. Raucous, irreverent, inventive, richly colloquial in its language, never afraid to press-gang the inappropriate into its service, it delights with its teasing turns of phrase and twists of plot. Snow-White's dwarfs turn out to be "Ex horse-race jockeys" who "squandered all their resources" at the race-track backing horses, and the talking mirror is commandeered to provide the names of future winners. As the glass revealed the name of its first tip "The Dwarfs went absolutely daft. / They kissed young Snow-White fore and aft."

But is it for children? The gulf between language for children and language of children, the prescriptive and the descriptive, remains, despite old-school grammar caned into young minds or deep-structured grammar encoded into them, marginally wide. Children do not speak as they are spoken to by adults. They speak as they speak with each other. But they are quite capable of making muppety forays into parental patter seizing a word or phrase which they might not fully understand and playing with it. (Indeed, some grown-up phelic utterances can only be rendered pleasurable when not understood.) Many authors who convert literature for children, particularly classics which were originally written for them, make the mistake of producing, in the name of comprehension, anodyne, simplified texts devoid of the joys of both adult and juvenile linguistic play. There are some neutered versions of fairytales which are reduced to bare accounts of their curious neurotic plots. Dahl, however, has chosen, like the best of children's authors to enjoy himself and the young will find his zest contagious and his rhymes bilarious even if they do not pick up every comic ounce. And his muse is admirably partnered by the witty drawings of Quentin Blake.

## Ballad

O sha is my love, and from India  
I shall fetch a feather back for bar.  
A peacock feather of green and blue,  
To show I am faithful, kind and true:

At the customs of disgrace  
Woe it with hoooc in my face

Oo the elcways of despair  
Carry it through the thinnalng air

Round rlog-roads of disillusion  
Briog it past traffics of confusion

The Ministers of the Ccown may wite  
Speeches to starve its colours white

The law lords in their courts may say  
This is out our law and he should obey

The heads on the television screens  
May patronise me to smithecens

But I will be faithful, kind and true,  
And a peacock feather of green and blue  
If what I shall fetch back for bar,  
Two thousand miles from India.

Alan Brownjohn



A detail from one of the stages of the journey undertaken by the solitary horseman in Anno's Britain (*Bodley Head*, £4.95. 0 370 30916 2), the most recent picture book by the Japanese artist Mitsunori Anno. *Like Anno's Journey and Anno's Italy*, the book has no text. It traces the progress of a horse and rider through British landscapes - which combines many familiar features - thatched cottages, half-timbered houses, village greens, and duck ponds - with a distinctive Japanese feel.

## Romantic and real

Kicki Moxon Browne

*Children of the Forest*, a book which is new to this country, was first published in Sweden in 1910. Elsie Beskow is the most consistently popular author-artist in her own country. (Recent statistics of loans from its public libraries put her second or third place of all authors - Astrid Lindgren has remained number one for many years.) *Children of the Forest* is perhaps Beskow's best-loved picture book. The text in the original is in verse, neat and precise, and with immaculate rhythm and rhyme - much of the book's appeal to children lies in the antipathy of the last word of each couplet. In the English version, the verses have - probably wisely - been replaced by prose and without the rhythm to hold it together, the text, which describes a typical year with a family of little people, has taken on a rather distant voice. One of the features which accounts for the book's huge, long-standing success is presumably the fascination of seeing tiny people surrounded by and putting into use - vastly enlarged, familiar objects. A Swedish child has an instant emotional response to a pine forest and its contents here so lovingly reproduced: adders, pismires to an ant hill, wild fungi (cantarelles, boletes, fly agaric), linnæa growing on mossy ground, a tiny forest farm reflecting the white sky of a Nordic summer night. But to an English child, all this may seem more exotic and therefore less absorbing. Nevertheless much of the book's delicate charm has survived.

From romantic forest idyll to the noisy present. *Going Shopping* is the briefest account of a routine trip to the supermarket. I liked the understated, double-edged quality of this book: on one level it is completely straightforward, and the simple text and lively pictures make it ideal for a child just learning to read. Parents, on the other hand, used to the repetitive slog of shopping with small children will smile at the echoes in the text: "Out of the car / And into the shop. / Shopping, shopping / more and more shopping."

Rather in the same vein is *Friday Something Funny Happened*, with a similarly po-faced reminder to the adult reader of how very unidly life is in the company of young children. This is a straight forward account of a few words and up to on the different days of a week, starting and finishing with "On Saturday we went shopping." The neutral tone is paired with frozen

drawings, capturing wonderfully the built-in slapstick quality of early childhood. These high-spirited children charge ahead like speedy bulldozers, knocking objects over and flattening them underfoot without even noticing, or absentmindedly falling over in the mud. The funny thing that happened on Friday was that peace and quiet suddenly descended.

*Angry Arthur* is about a small boy who gets so angry about not being allowed to watch a late television programme that his anger summons up thunder, lightning and typhoons, causing first the house to crack up, rather like a film set, then the town, then the whole earth. (Arthur's grandmother in an astronaut's suit sits cosily knitting in her rocking chair, the ball of wool floating weightlessly above her.) Finally, Arthur's fury unleashes a universequake, and we leave him sitting on his bed in empty space, trying to remember what it was that he got so angry about. It is an apt, affectionate description of the black, all-devouring rage every child feels from time to time. There is no attempt at moralizing, and because of the sheer, extravagance of it all, there is no need to smooth things over by introducing a "happy ending".

If *Angry Arthur* is hyperbolic, the mood in the wordless *Moonlight* is very different: cool, calm, always realistic. In the earlier *Sunshine* by the same artist, we sat in on the start of a day in a little girl's life, and now we can observe the same girl at the opposite end of the day, gloomily graduating from supper to bedtime to bedtime. Jan Ormerod's quietly amusing drawings are excellent studies of people pottering about doing nothing in particular except getting on with day-to-day living, and the humour often stems from her ability to capture odd little gestures and mannerisms in people.

*My World* is a series of snapshots - verbal and pictorial - of the people and everyday objects that surround a small girl. The blurb on the inside flap informs us wordily that the book is "for parent-child sharing or just as a quiet reading experience", but the book itself is likeable and light-hearted. The text consists of a series of relaxed little verses. I rather liked the fact that no attempt has been made to squeeze them into a particular metre by adding on extra words. Instead they amble on freely with a rhyme at the end of every two lines. I also like the funny little images: the mother who has so much hair you could stuff an old armchair with it; the dog that looks as if it is made of marbled chocolate and vanilla cake... mixture... The... pictures... in

deliciously bright colours look good enough to eat.

A new book by John Burningham is always eagerly awaited. In his *Avocado Baby*, an ailing baby steadfastly refuses to eat until one day it is given mashed avocado pear, devours it (with a rather surprised look on its face) and from then on develops superhuman strength. Forever dressed in a blue babygown and with an engagingly bald head, the baby carts grand pianos and cars about, and sorts out baddies, acting as a bodyguard for its rather weedy family, resting innocently in its carrycot, in between. As if to stress the fact that avocados really deserve a reputation for being a wonderful food the endpapers solemnly include a botanically detailed drawing of a *Persea gratissima* in all its different stages, with little Burninghamesque babies clambering all over the plants. I find his reluctant jole de vivre completely irresistible.

A new book from Pat Hutchins is always a treat too, and in the counting book *One Hunter* she gives her usual virtuoso performance. A big game hunter goes stalking across the plain gun cocked and eyes fixed determinedly straight ahead. Only the reader notices that he is walking straight past, sometimes even right on top of, various tropical animals, partly hidden in the vegetation. Only the sound of a flock of parrots rising alerts the hunter, and he turns to face "10 porrets 9 snakes 8 monkeys" and so on; turn to the next page and he is seen running for his life, gun and spectacles flying. Of all the counting books I have come across, this certainly has the highest dramatic content.

ELSA BESKOW: *Children of the Forest*. Ernest Benn. £3.95. 0 510 001289

SARAH GAGLIANO: *Going Shopping*. Bodley Head. £3.50. 0 370 30446 2

JOHN PRATER: *On Friday Something Funny Happened*. Bodley Head. £3.95. 0 370 30449 7

HIAWYN OBAM: *Angry Arthur*. Illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura. Andersen Press. £3.95. 0 86264 017 2

JAN ORMEROD: *Moonlight*. Kestrel Books. £3.95. 0 7226 5749 8

KILMENY NILANO: *My World*. Hodder and Stoughton. £3.50. 0 340 26626 0

JOHN BURNINGHAM: *Avocado Baby*. Jonathan Cape. £3.95. 0 224 02004 8

PAT HUTCHINS: *One Hunter*. Bodley Head. £3.95. 0 370 30930 0

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Hodder & Stoughton. Children's Books



Judith Elkin

DIANA WYNNE JONES  
Witch Week  
Macmillan. £5.50.  
0 333 33189 3

Diana Wynne Jones has returned to the fast-moving pace and immensely entertaining tone of *Charmed Life* in this latest book. The time is, more or less, our familiar present-day world, but heavily steeped in witchcraft, and in a period of suppression: witchcraft is illegal, witches are hunted on bonfires and the Inquisitors are an everyday threat.

Set within the enclosed community of a boarding school, the action centres on class 2Y who, at the age of about twelve, are just discovering their own witchcraft, some reluctantly, some delightedly, others unwittingly and with hilarious results. The story begins with a note to the teacher of 2Y, saying "Someone in this class is a witch." An innocuous-enough comment but one which is punishable by hurling. The teacher broods on the implications of the note and the children reveal their private daily diaries, revealing, although somewhat obscurely, their individual feelings, viewpoints and relationships. In the first few pages, the reader is offered a huge amount of instant background detail and is likely to be totally committed to this outrageous story.

It transpires that there is more than one witch in the class, and this idea allows free rein to Diana Wynne Jones's vividly inventive imagination, as she explores the children's varied, yet largely uncontrolled magic, set against their constant fear of discovery. As usual she manages to follow several parallel threads without any loss of impetus or blurring of characters.

## Star turns

Gillian Cross

HELEN ROPNER  
Helping Mr Paterson  
Chatto and Windus. £4.95.  
0 7011 2605 1

JEAN WILLS  
Stargazers' Folly  
Hemish Hamilton. £4.95.  
0 241 10769 2

There is always a shortage of original, interesting plots. It is sad, therefore, to find two of them which fall to develop into properly satisfying books. Of the two, *Helping Mr Paterson* is the more original. William, the narrator, and his two sisters, Rose and Minnie, befriend Mr Paterson, an eccentric stranger who believes that people should reject the trappings of modern society and listen for "the voices of the old world". They save him from drowning and try to protect him from the hostility of Mrs Brewster, a busybody and local councillor. (Why do local councillors get such undeservedly harsh treatment in children's books?) Gradually, they come to believe in his ideas and go with him to join in his televised attempt to call up the Loch Ness monster. While the television cameras are on him, Mr Paterson chooses to tell in this attempt, but later he calls up the monster and vanishes, leaving each of the children with a gift: Rose learns to express her feelings through her violin playing; William achieves his ambition of taking a photograph; Minnie, who is closest to Mr Paterson, is left his soul in her photograph.

There are several ways to treat a story like this but, unfortunately, the book does not choose one in particular. For much of the time - when Mr Paterson is sacrificing an egg in the local stone circle, for example, or being mistaken for an UFO - it is broadly comic. But the main theme of listening to the old world and its gods, is obviously serious and there is a

There is Nan who has a peculiar gift of tongues which leads to her apparently uncontrollable and stonch-turning description of school dinners, while seated at the top table with the Headmistress and important guests. Yet this is the gift which proves vital at the final climax of the story. There is Charles, the loner, who turns out to be a very powerful, but very self-interested witch, who first discovers the extent of his power when he calls all the shoes in the school (hundreds of them) into the school hall, in an attempt to find his trisners, but quite unsuccessfully, as Nirupan has already turned them into a chocolate cake which the class hully has eaten, spikes and all.

Fear of the Inquisitors finally drives the children to cull the powerful Enchanter, Chresimanci, to their aid. He needs all his powers and that of the witches in 2Y to surmount what has gone wrong with their world. This is a theme familiar in the author's earlier books: parallel worlds split from each other at a significant point in history and thence develop separately. But in this case, two worlds have not split cleanly, leaving one world with an unequal share of outlawed witchcraft still partly attached to an almost identical world with too little witchcraft. Chresimanci has to find the point in history where things went wrong and try to unify the two worlds.

This is a much less demanding book than *The Homeward Bounders*, but it contains a great deal of very entertaining reading, which will appeal to many children. The story romps along, the dialogue is excellent and the characters carefully observed. These are real characters whom you might find in any second year in a comprehensive school, but drawn large in this vivid world of magic. The reader is left wondering how normal teachers actually manage without magical powers.

moment of genuine emotion and power when the master finally emerges from Loch Ness. It is, of course, not impossible to combine the two moods, but the combination requires a sensitive touch and much greater subtlety of characterization than is shown here. Moreover, the idea of listening to the old gods is not clearly thought out. For Rose, it implies the integration of emotion and technique. For Mr Paterson, it seems to involve blowing into a sea shell to summon fish. Had these two concepts, and the varied moods of the book, been convincingly linked, the story could have been extremely powerful. As it is, it straddles an uneasy gap between two very different genres.

*Stargazers' Folly* has more modest aims. Greg, who is mad about astronomy, conceals a plan to make his own telescope and set up a secret observatory in the dome of the local college. Unfortunately, his friends insist on joining in. Having sneaked into the dome for the first session of stargazing, they are accidentally looked in and watch their town being flooded. But their trespassing is forgiven, because they are able to save some pictures from flood damage. All ends well. Solitary Greg makes a good friend and gets his observatory, made from the polystyrene packing case of his mother's new freezer.

Greg is a likeable character. His obsession with astronomy is completely credible and the details of his attempt to make a telescope are fascinating. Instead of developing this aspect of the story, however, the author has chosen to fill the book with an enormous number of people who all talk constantly. There are six or seven of Greg's friends, plus art students, art teachers and other adults. Eventually, the barrage of names and chat becomes exhausting, because a few of the characters develop any real personality or relationships. Since the story, although interesting, is rather slight for a book of this length, it founders like an overloaded boat, which is a pity, because Jean Wills clearly has a feel for the atmosphere of school life and the excitement generated by an enthralling interest.

## Misdeeds and misunderstandings

Brian Baumfield

SHEILA LAVELLE  
The Fiend Next Door  
Hamish Hamilton. £4.95.  
0 241 10774 1

BETSY BYARS

The Animal, The Vegetable and John D. Jones  
Bodley Head. £13.95.  
0 370 30914 6

Horrid children are always fun to read about, but traditionally they should get their just deserts - unless related to the St Trinians family. In these two books rewards and penalties are meted out in varying degrees of sophistication. Both deal with relationships - the first a symbiotic friendship between two neighbouring girls of similar age, and the second concerning the difficulties and misunderstandings faced by the children of two families brought together by the divorce of their respective parents.

The book by Sheila Lavelle, author of *My Best Friend* is aimed at readers of eight years old and over, and consists of the further misdeeds of one Angela Mitchell and her next door friend Charlotte, known as "Charlie". Angela is the innovator of fiendish tricks and with devilish skill manages

invariably to involve the comparatively innocent Charlie, ensuring that it is she who always gets the blame. The pranks vary from the merely mischievous to the downright dangerous. It is one thing to let loose a bat in the classroom under the pretext of it being an interesting pet, but quite another to pretend to kidnap a baby, or hijack a milkfloat which nearly crashes.

In the final chapter the fiend could be said to get her too-mild come-uppance, when her deceitful trick rebounds and reveals her to be both mean and spiteful. Undoubtedly there are children like these two, but while Charlie emerges as an average, if rather weak-willed child, Angela comes over as a thoroughly nasty little girl, seemingly lacking in any redeeming grace. One wonders why the friendship survived. The structure of the book is wholly episodic, but it is genuinely funny and the invention never flags. One is left with a slightly uneasy feeling, however, that it should carry a Government Health Warning.

*The Animal, The Vegetable and John D. Jones* by Betsy Byars explores with greater subtlety the conflict that can arise between siblings, between children and their parents, and between families when brought together in confined surroundings. Betsy Byars is an American writer with a successful string of children's books to her credit. Although this one is set firmly in the United States (with some expressions unfamiliar to British

readers), the characters and situations will be universally recognized.

Clara and her elder sister DeeDee are to go on holiday with their divorced father in a house by the sea. Clara is already resentful and jealous of her sister, who seems to have greater claim on her father's attention. However, both sisters are united in their shock and annoyance when they discover their father's friend, Dolores, also a divorcee, is to join them on holiday with her son John D. Jones. John D. is a precocious, and on the surface at least, unattractive boy, who sees the world as "a big bland glass of non-sense" into which he is "the odd tablet dropped in to start things fizzing". Distancing himself from his mother and companions, he views them with superior distaste - a feeling so evident that it provokes instant dislike from Clara and DeeDee. The subsequent development of plot, which results in self discovery for both Clara and John D., and a realization that the world is a more tolerable place than they had supposed, is achieved with considerable effect and economy of effort.

The characters of the children are well drawn and many a child (and adult) will readily understand why John D. chooses to put himself into such an uncomfortable position, and why Clara feels constrained to test her own physical endurance to the point of danger. A thoughtful, entertaining book for nine-year olds.

## The would-be deliverer

Cara Chanteau

TANITH LEE  
Prince on a White Horse  
Macmillan. £5.50.  
0 333 33292 5

The story opens, in the best tradition, with a prince riding his horse through the Waste. The immediate problem is that the Prince cannot remember his name, where he comes from, how he got there and has simply no idea what country he is in. In fact, he never does discover the identity of the country, yields answers to all the other questions. At a rough guess, one could locate the country as a little way off the coast of the land where *The Wild Things Are*, adjoining Narnia, abutting Mordor, adjacent to Wonderland, and certainly very close to twelfth-century France.

The resulting miscellany provides, at its best, a lot of amusing writing and occasional moments of parody as the hero copes with Oogingins (like bats), Beezles, Buzzles and Boozles (like Wild Things); honnerdins (like ants) and all the other colourful fauna which confront him in this strange world. He

is aided and abetted by his horse who has a nice line in dry equine wit reminiscent of Bree in *The Horse and His Boy*. The horse has many other useful talents - drawing Bazzlegems, changing into a lion and the like - which prove quite providential in extracting the Prince from potentially trying situations. Indeed, the Prince finds a quantity of helpers: Gormet the Red who has trouble deciding that he doesn't want to be a champion after all and then finds himself compelled to do the decent thing; Gormet, the rather impatient Lady of the Waste; assorted Theels and Kreels and the beautiful sky people.

Things begin to sort themselves out when the Prince meets Vultikan the Hoiler, a Vultukilly Blacksmith type, who provides him with a sword and a suit of armour, and informs him that he is the Looked-for-Deliverer. To the bewildered Prince, this sounds like the name of a town or a very old book nobody ever bothered to read. The Prince finds life in a unfamiliar world fairly confusing and really prefers the quiet life. He is therefore cast in the role of reluctant hero. Much of the humour arises out of the justifiable irritation his helpers feel when faced by this recalcitrant and ignorant Looked-for-Deliverer. It is

true that it is not easy to respond in a suitably chivalric manner to somebody who, once you have gone to all the trouble of telling him about the Castle of Bone where all the secrets of the world are hidden, guarded by a one hundred per cent effective dragon, turns round and says "Well, in that case, I think I'll leave it" - hardly the reaction of a Perceval with whom there is a discernible similarity, but then bleeding lances and holy grails are not in question. The Prince is to fight against Nulgrave, at the mention of whose name everyone falls into a terrified silence. Nulgrave, it emerges later, is a sort of foggy personification of despair. The Prince, however, gradually assumes his weighty responsibilities and muddles through.

If all this is beginning to sound insufferably derivative, the mixture is leavened by a quirky humour that makes the whole escapade much more enjoyable than a mere amalgam of mythologies. It is though Le Mort d'Arthur had been written by the author of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Although Tanith Lee's story may not possess the lasting resonance and moral dimension of myth as you know and love them, she has none the less concocted a story which is bound to please, and prepare those of tea plus for joys in store.

## A psychological friend

Josephine Karavasil

HELEN CRESSWELL  
Dear Shrink  
Faber. £5.25.  
0 571 119123

Although said to be for "younger teenagers", the target market for *Dear Shrink* is in fact difficult to determine because the shifting identity of the first-person narrator, Oliver, places it somewhat uneasily between the Bagthorpe Saga and a teenage novel with a highly "literate" narrator like Alden Chambers's *Breakfast*. The first half of the story is told in retrospect by an Oliver of sixteen or so, from diaries kept at the time. The second half is a series of letters from the thirteen-year-old Oliver to Mr Jung, the "Shrink" of the title, and the friend like Auntie Frank's Killy, to whom he writes because he has no one else to confide in. A narrator who can mention Jung's Theory of the Syndromicity and the collective unconscious, Jane Eyre, Oliver Twist,

Rosie, David Copperfield and Lady Macbeth, quote from *Hamlet*, and allude to T. S. Eliot makes the book seem appropriate for prodigiously literate older teenagers, yet the story he tells, of a somewhat cosy family coming into contact with death and the "real world" of people in care, is for rather younger children.

Oliver, the middle child of a professional middle-class family, his brother William and sister Lucy are left with a housekeeper, Mrs Barty, when their parents go off to explore the Amazon jungle. Barty is quite unlike their mother's rosy memories of her, but the children learn to live with her reasonably amicably. When she suddenly dies of a heart attack they have to be put into care. Oliver and Lucy stay at a foster home until they are sent to a Home. There Lucy and Oliver get to know Mark, an apprentice plumber who wants to get rich. When the couple in charge of the Home have to leave for family reasons, all the children, especially Mark, feel betrayed. Mark runs away and vandalizes Oliver's family house,

before making off in the family car. Meanwhile, Oliver, William and Lucy are missing their parents so much that they plan an escape to their shack in the countryside. Arriving there in a blizzard just before Christmas, they find Mark in hiding with a broken leg. Just when they seem impossibly snowed in, a helicopter, complete with father, arrives. The parents have decided that they could not, after all, leave Christmas away from their children.

Despite the pat ending, the story is very readable, with the plot developing at a good pace. People's reactions to death are astutely handled. Barty's own daughter, called "deceit", and are mainly interested in the division of her belongings, but, in one of the most closely observed moments of the book, Oliver and William experience the shock of going out to ordinary street life after the trauma of a death in the house. Elsewhere the humour is characteristic of Helen Cresswell and the technique of letters to a "psychological friend" enables her to pose some serious social and psychological questions with a pleasing lightness of touch.

## The problems of the gifted child

Alan Hollinghurst

ANDREW LANG  
The Chronicles of Pantouffia  
191pp. Methuen. £5.50.  
0 416 21940 3

The chronicles of Pantouffia combine two books, the story of *Prince Prigio* (1889) and the adventures of his son, *Prince Ricardo* (1893), both antedated *The Blue Fairy Book* of 1899, the first in Andrew Lang's great spectrum of anthologies of children's stories. But they reveal already an imagination steeped in fairy literature, and add to that tradition with considerable sophistication. The stories repeatedly take their bearings by literary cross-reference. Some of these would be appreciated by children: the king of Pantouffia is the grandson of Cinderella and includes Madame La Belle au Bois-Dormant among his ancestors; Prince Prigio is given the whole battery of fairy gifts - seven-league boots, flying carpets, wishing caps and so on. On the other hand Prince Ricardo is saved by a weapon-shaped sword by Sir Kenelm Digby, and his tale has elements drawn from

Scott and Ariosto as well as the Gswain poet and others; the tale of the Yellow Dwarf recounted here awaits its proper placement, six years later, in *The Blue Fairy Book*, as not only a country but, as its name suggests, a state of slippage, ease, bookish, witty and even cynical in its handling of the stuff of children's fiction.

The best idea in the book is one which specially allows for this intellectual approach. At his christening Prince Prigio receives from a fairy the gift of being "too clever". As a result Prigio is always precociously right, correcting his own tutors, and spending his spare time in such pursuits as translating Egyptian hieroglyphs into French poetry. But as he soon learns, cleverness has to be concealed if one is to be liked; and if one falls in love then a belief in the impossibilities of the fairy world will replace the reliance on "borned, useless facts". To impress the daughter of the English ambassador, he undertakes a daring exploit and brings her the head of the salamandrine Firebrake, which he has cleverly provoked into battle with the icy Remora, a dismayed creature with a head an inch high and a mile wide.

The battle between the two is an emblem of the *Chronicles'* concern

with balancing the intellect and the heart, the material and the passionate. Prince Ricardo in the second book is the opposite of his father, spilt by fairy books and easy victories secured by the fairy gifts. We sustain Lang's fancies, like Barrie's, with the applause which expresses our belief, at the same time as we see that to rely on fairyhood too much would be to turn irresistibly away from the world. Ricardo is corrected by the substitution of ordinary boots, cap and carpet for the magic ones, though saved from the worse scrapes in which this lands him by Princess Jaqueline, a sorceress who turns herself into various insects to sting his adversaries. This story is far more convoluted and referential than that of Prigio, and is both denser in incident and more facetious in treatment; its pleasantest caprice is perhaps the mass conversion of the heads to the Lutheran Church. There is also the amusingly belligerent Giant Who Does Not Know When He Has Had Enough, a figure derived from the Green Man and disastrously diserved (as are all the episodes) by the simplistic illustrations of Jeanne Titherington, in several shades of grey, which recast this droll and superior book in a limbo drained of significance and render its knowingness as a fatuous naïveté.

## Encountering the marvellous

Eva Gillies

RUTH MANNING-SANDERS  
A Book of Heroes and Heroines  
Illustrated by Robin Jacques  
Methuen. £4.95.  
0 416 89310 4

JOHN MERCER  
The Stories of Vanishing Peoples  
Illustrated by Tony Evora  
Allison and Busby. £5.95.  
0 85031 421 6

Having run out, it seems, of dragons, witches and monsters, Ruth Manning-Sanders has in her latest collection of tales focused on human heroes and heroines; with, in fact, a certain amount of positive discrimination in favour of the latter. The heroes in these stories are on the whole homely, not glamorous figures: one Arabian prince, yes, but after that it's Jack and Dick and Grandfather Pavel - peasants, apprentices, at most a retired Hussar who's taken to farming, and their encounters with the marvellous are appropriately practical, brisk, almost reluctant. They seem relieved to return, more or less, to the status quo - Grandfather Pavel to his hut among the mountains, Jack to cutting his mother's peat each morning. A workaday lot, by and large.

The heroines seem at first to provide a welcome contrast. There is, indeed, one lonely old woman from Schleswig-Holstein to balance that incongruous Arabian prince; but the others are uniformly young and beautiful. They lead active lives, too. In Sweden, a lovely persecuted princess breaks the enchantment that has transformed her beloved into a big grey wolf; when the couple return in triumph, the classic stepmother - and her two daughters - are duly turned into bats. In Russia, the princess - the same or another, it hardly seems to matter - defeats the witch and breaks the spell with kisses; in Italy, the girl is a shoemaker's daughter, the evil old female an ogreess, and the prince imprisoned underground, beneath a cabbage. Always, it is the princess, not the prince, who does the rescuing; yet, as the effect is not of gallant adventure at all, there is a sameness about these loyal and active heroines, even the Red Indian Bright Star Child: not only young and beautiful (as is only proper), they are also presented as uniformly, depressingly, nice. We are forever being told, "unusually, about Princesses". Somebody's improbably sweet and loving nature. Well, of course, she's the goodly in the story - but need she have quite so much might sprinkled on her? The spice, I suppose, he sought in Robin Jacques's beautiful and often witty

illustrations, which add greatly to the pleasure of the book.

One turns with ungrateful relief to John Mercer's collection of tales handed down by the doomed and dying peoples of the world: by Eskimos and Ainu, Brazilian Indians and Gypsies and the nomad peoples of the Sahara. They feature armadillos, beavers and red-cheeked monkeys, and the life and death of a man-eating sun. Not why the sea is boiling hot, or whether pigs have wings - these are foolish questions after all: but how the Old Man made the world, and how man first got fire; why the owl has such huge eyes, why some animals are still wild while others live with man; why the Gypsy hiddle can make men laugh and cry, and the Efe Pygmies, unlike other people, are not afraid of lightning. The stories are often funny, sometimes sad, but always concerned to make sense, both of the natural world and of human social institutions. There is a leanness about

them, a sparseness, a sense of imagination unsoftened by self-indulgent fancy. They are good stories in themselves, entertaining and full of queer twists and turns; but - like Tony Evora's attractive woodcuts - fundamentally serious.

Will post-industrial children like them? I am not sure. It is (as Mercer's admirable introduction makes plain) our world that has destroyed or is destroying the peoples that created these myths; the same world has made serious myth almost incomprehensible to intelligent children. There is science; and there is fantasy about demons and magic pebbles and beautiful princesses. Can the split ever be healed again? It seems on the face of it impossible, but John Mercer deserves credit, not only for introducing our children to the vanishing peoples of the earth, but for offering to their attention this very different kind of story.

## A magic staff

Ruth Harris

P. L. TRAVERS  
Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane  
Collins. £4.95.  
0 00 181126

Nearly fifty years ago, when Mary Poppins arrived at Number 17 Cherry Tree Lane and said up the banisters, it was Jane and Michael who saw her do it and Jane and Michael who watched her unpacking her empty carpet bag - "Nothing in it, did you say?" - and gulped down a spoonful each from her magic bottle, pink strawberry ice for Michael and lime juice cordial, green and silvery, for Jane. The early Mary Poppins books are written from the children's point of view. They don't tell their parents about their adventures. Mary Poppins is their private link between the fantastic and the commonplace and whether undoing a button with a look or the ceiling, she remains the same priggish, correct and completely reliable. Her characteristic reaction is a superior sniff. Snap, snap go her heels along the pavement and even her back has an angry look. There is no argle-bargle with Mary Poppins. She is so vain that she has to admire herself in every shop window, and she is as touchy as Griseida's dear cuckoo but somehow she is always right and the children know it.

Now after a long silence Mary Poppins is back and quite properly things have changed. *Mary Poppins in Cherry Tree Lane* begins not with Jane

and Michael but the Park Keeper and this is no longer a children's world. It is Midsummer's Eve, the most magical night of the year, and the Park Keeper, scraps of cucumber sandwich behind his ears, walks backward with his eyes shut in search of his true love. (Things have changed so much that Mary Shepard's illustrations might almost be by Gorey.) He bumps into Mary Poppins who is entertaining her friends to a picnic, which is attended by some of the stars and constellations, Orion, Castor and Pollux, Ursa Minor, the Fox in search of foxgloves and the hare looking for parsley. Everything is bead over heels tonight. Mr Banks the children's father is back in Mrs Cory's shop, white-collared and velvet-suited, his nose on a level with the counter and it is that Mary Poppins behind him! Nothing is quite what it seems and the air is full of echoes. Mary Poppins is still prin and her tongue is as sharp as ever but would this Mary Poppins that we used to know have taken the twist on a supper picnic? Anabel, perhaps, the sleep in the pram but surely not the twins. The day is over and in the wide unfamiliar darkness the bushes are croneching bushes ready to spring.

This is a book for addicts who will remember "Pop goes the Weasel" played on a musical box in a littered work-room - and recognize the Nightingale who sticks a shining needle into Mary Poppins's hat. To meet an old friend after long absence is always dangerous and she may have gained a new dimension but we are still in a world where bandages are as handsome as the best foot is in a one in front. Start may come down from the sky and Orion wear a new sparkle in his belt but Mary Poppins remains triumphantly herself.

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# The battle of the books

Nicholas Tucker

SHEILA RAY  
The Blyton Phenomenon  
Deutsch, £10.95.  
0 233 97441 5

The title of this study is well-chosen: Enid Blyton's success, both during and after her life-time, still appears truly phenomenal. Nothing of its scale occurred before in children's literature, nor ever will probably again, now that television viewing has become so much more popular than reading. Yet Blyton-mania has received scant critical attention, despite the equally phenomenal growth of interest in children's literature also taking place in the last two decades.

All this should mean that this book is lost in an extraordinary gap, and as a bibliographical record it is certainly thorough. But having collected what must be almost every reference made to Blyton in print, the author was unwise to include so many of them. Remarks gleaned from forty years of press reports and book reviews too often seem trivial or repetitive, and they are not even particularly valid guide to current attitudes towards Blyton herself. Since for the author's M Phil theses on the same topic is not always a sure guide to the reader outside, and the first section of this study, subtitled *Enid Blyton and the Librarians*, should have been considerably edited.

Things improve when Sheila Ray takes a closer look at the stories themselves, comparing them to novels dealing with similar themes by more ambitious children's authors. Her conclusions are mixed: to explain Blyton's success, and also the comparative popular failure of her more distinguished rivals. While all of them wrote for children, the image of childhood implicit in the works of

earlier authors, as well as those working in the same tradition since, is often very different. Most of them, for example, will at times address their audience in two contrasting ways, talking to readers as younger beings of limited understanding in one breath, and as adults in the making in the next. There are sound reasons for doing this, given that childhood is a transitory period of unequal emotional and intellectual development. Within it, children themselves have always shown evidence of mature and immature comprehension, both in the books they read and elsewhere.



One of Bill's methods for dealing with the mushroom-gatherer's bad-tempered children. An illustration from *Bill the Minder*, a collection of stories by W. Heath Robinson, which was first published in 1912 and has recently been reissued in a special limited edition of 500 copies by Hodder and Stoughton (£25pp., £30. 0.340 27965 6).

When children's authors are accused of writing over the heads of their audience, therefore, it might be fairer to recognize that unless this is very overdone they are more accurately addressing the potential adult within every child. Alison Uttley, for example, does this through her use of history and tradition; A. A. Milne through his more sophisticated sense of humour; Kenneth Grahame through classical parody and Russell Hoban, in our own times, through satire of fashionable artistic modes. Most children won't understand all this straightaway, but the occasional puzzlement is an inevitable feature of childhood, and within reason a spur towards greater understanding next time round.

While teachers, librarians and

parents sometimes objected to such ready and undemanding fare, children themselves fell on it with the enthusiasm they show for other child-centred products this century. Here, after all, was literature that made them feel big rather than small, peopled by child characters equal or superior to any adults who threatened to get in their way. As all this is skilfully narrated at a good lick in predictable language, stripped of any complex overtones, and a young audience can become deliciously puffed up on two counts: both as fantasy super-humans and also as adept readers of fiction. For getting to the end of a novel is also an adventure for the immature and unconfident, at last able to overcome the verbal obstacles that lie between them and the final page.

Looking back on it now, anyone who once knew the intoxication of tearing through a Blyton story in this way will not find it easy to condemn such a pleasurable experience. She was, at least in small doses, a marvellous writer for so many children, and given that life itself will always continue to cut young readers down to size elsewhere, there is little danger that identifying with the Famous Five or the Secret Seven can ever be more than harmless wish-fulfilment. Yet one can also understand the anxiety her books once caused. Too much Blyton could mean less time for the other, more intellectually stimulating authors who ask more of the reader and are therefore never going to be as popular in a culture that sees instant gratification as its most important goal.

At the same time, Blyton's strong social prejudices, although sometimes exaggerated by critics, are not helpful in preparing young readers for life in their own country. Lastly, she proved a poor friend to the cause of children's literature and those trying to promote it in schools, bookshops and libraries. Instead, her example helped give it the low esteem with most adult critics it is still struggling to shake off today.

But as Sheila Ray fairly concludes, the Blyton controversy has now run out of steam. Critics formerly shocked by her facile prose could not have predicted the even more impoverished entertainment that now exists for children on television (just as those who once railed against the *Daily Mirror* as the ultimate in vulgarization clearly never anticipated the possibility one day of a newspaper like *The Sun*). When the more blatant racist and class overtones are extracted from Blyton books, as they usually are in her current reissues, there is even a small literary case to be made for a few of her books – something Sheila Ray argues eloquently for. A top ten critical selection from Britain's most controversial children's writer is certainly a sign of the times, as is the fact that the radical London bookshop, Centreprise, recently stocked some Famous Five stories because of the continuous demand for them. As for former rows about denying Blyton books shelf-space in public libraries, such decisions are now rendered unimportant by the existence of cheap paperback versions, often available in shops that hesitate to stock other children's books.

Yet if the battle over Blyton has largely resulted in a famous victory for Little Noddy and his friends, the arguments it once raised are not entirely over. It may be harder to attack her work now there is more objectionable material around for children both in print and in other media, but justifying the ascendancy of the bad by the existence of the still worse is a feeble argument. Sheila Ray's interesting study is a reminder of a time when there were still public arguments about the overall desirability of certain types of entertainment for children. Only the most blandly acquiescent optimist could hold that there is no longer any need for such debate about the dubious cultural climate we provide for children today.

## commentary

# The perpetual present of appetite

Peter Conrad

Falstaff  
Covent Garden

Triumphantly progressing from Los Angeles to Florence by way of Covent Garden, undergoing immortalization on record and video-cassette, the production of *Falstaff* which brings Carlo Maria Giulini back to opera after fourteen years may have the look of a pre-packaged and pre-acclaimed media event. It is not that, however. It is simply a great musical occasion: a *fabulous* performance by the infinite pains Giulini has taken over it, and by the assembling of an unmatchable cast.

The production began as a project of (and has been recorded with) the Los Angeles Symphony Orchestra. Giulini's notion of the work is therefore symphonic. He has even jokingly proposed that it could be played in the absence of the singers, the orchestra here constitutes a *world* – a thronging comic society, a vividly populous landscape. Its rhythmic energy and grace transcribe the ubiquitous manoeuvrings of the comic spirit, that melioristic god personified by the positivist nineteenth century. It's an unpausing score, never evolving. It exists in the perpetual present of appetite and its attendant gratifications. This, together with the delicacy and refinement on which Giulini insists, links it with Don Giovanni. Both are the music of desire in a baffling quest of its prey, desisting to look back.

There's never any brassy bombast in the playing. For Falstaff's monologues, the orchestra manages a discreet, whispering, over-the-shoulder music: it is intruding on his private self-seriousity, and scarcely dare make audible his fears of his imminent discomfiture and demise. As in *Don Giovanni*, the ardent and eager isolation of Verdi's hero are his anxious outracing of death, his desperate seizure of the day. At Giulini's behest, the pleasures of sense in which Falstaff trusts can be heard as a sort of exultation, just as Don Giovanni's warm flesh is haunted by the cold, unyielding music of the underworld. A grave opens in the orchestra pit when Falstaff reads a letter and confronts the seduction of his own resources. The twelve strokes of the clock in the twilight forest, enumerated by the pining Falstaff, are another auditory way of reckoning. The dying of day outside the inn, as the sun fades from the sky and the moon rises, is a time when Falstaff with her fable of the hanged man before disappearing to call his bluff through the twilight, is the thing of life. The *finis* will dance above an abyss. This is why – to the discomfort of critics reared on the *Don Giovanni* of Solti or the lewd *Don Giovanni* of Gatti – the *Don Giovanni* of Gatti is played and sung (by the Falstaff of Renato Bruson) so reflectively. It is, in Giulini's interpretation, a meditation on the last things, and a dance of death under it in the orchestra.

Falstaff here inspects his own end and, therefore, when the final overture swells up, it embodies, like the revivifying trill when Falstaff does *nonno* again: it is the heroic reawakening of Don Giovanni, who returns to repent or mourn.

Giulini denies that *Falstaff* is an opera *buffa*. Its humour is the resolute banishing of a pain and fear which *opera buffa* simply excludes. Thus his orchestra never parodies the sentiments of the characters, but validates them. When Quickly tells Falstaff that Alice is distracted with love of him and laments over her as a "povera donna", the strings weep in commiseration. The jealous Ford is ejected from comedy altogether during his monologue. His wife's stratagem to reclaim him and reunite them; but the agency which effects this is not a mere practical joke – rather it's a wise, humbling and humanizing demonstration that we are all liable to err. An admission of one's own folly, in this work, entitles one to salvation.

*Falstaff*, far from *opera buffa*, comes close to being a *divine comedy*. In this respect Ronald Eyre's production, despite the galling the others have put on him as a compliment not to *Falstaff*, proceeds to convert his *Don Giovanni* and – since at this moment the house lights – all the rest of us to his philosophy of ludic inconsequence. Giulini darkens the score so that this eventual lightening can seem a hard-won, nearly-missed redemption. As a similar experiment with comedy's power to recover from tragedy, Alice takes up Mistress Quickly's narrative of the huntsman – that revenant who, like Mozart's Commendatore, represents the punitive recurrence of eternity in human time – and finishes it as a nonsensical fable, giggling at its facetious terrors. When the characters of *Falstaff* laugh, it's because they are laughing something off. Hence, when the work is played with Giulini's care for detail, the sextuple "No" with which Alice and Nanetta dispute Ford's project to marry the girl to Dr

cardinals pacing on stilts preside over his inquisition, while he is jabbed with flaming brands. The women kneel to plead that he be rendered chaste and impotent; Falstaff himself unregenerately begs that his abdomen be spared. The comic character is here subjected to tragic arraignment. But Falstaff has the verdict commuted. There is moral grandeur, as against the impudence of a Volpone soliciting the audience to free him with its applause, to the way Falstaff literally authorizes his own persecution by claiming to be not only witty in himself but the cause of wit in others. Moments before, receding from the sound of the bell and the spells of the fairies, he'd been a mortal in dread of damnation. Now he is a comic god who, no longer craving

abundant body that he can alter it simply by wishing to do so. Singing is an artistic miracle staged inside the body yet transcending it: thus Bruson, describing his leanness when a page in the Duke of Norfolk's service, squeezes the word "sottile" (which denotes his slenderness) as he utters it, emulating it so as to earn the right then to rhyme it with "gentile". Gentility is also a quality this Falstaff can properly claim. He greets Quickly with courtesy, deference, and even though he under-tilts her he sings his salutation with such impeccable vocal manners that he's at once forgiven. Gerard Evans, dressing for his erotic embassy to Alice, always made a decrepit top of himself. Bruson, newly costumed in white for this outing, looks magnificent. Instead of a joke, a searching human point has been made: the delicious falsetto of Falstaff's "Vado a farmi bello" contrasts his contented self-love with Ford's menacing self-diagnosis. Nor are his sexual adventures absurd. When planning his conquest of Alice in the inn or surrendering her as she plays the lute, he sings with the sly softness of a hand attempting a preliminary, tentative caress.



Victor Mouri, who created the role of Falstaff and subsequently sang it in New York and London in 1895. This photograph, from the *Mander and Mitcheson Theatre Collection*, is reproduced in the *English National Opera Royal Opera Guide* to Falstaff (128pp. John Calder, £2.00. 0 7145 3921 X) with in a series under the editorship of Nicholas John. It contains critical essays, a thematic guide, a discography and a bibliography and a full libretto with English translation by Andrew Porter. Three other recent releases in the series are *Falstaff* at Met (0 7145 3906 6), *Boris Godunov* (0 7145 3922 8) and *Der fliegende Holländer* (0 7145 3920 1).

Caia can sound like a real, resilient affirmation. The comic spirit is another name, in the nineteenth century, for the life-force, which here opposes a fate it considers worse than death.

Giulini denies that *Falstaff* is an opera *buffa*. Its humour is the resolute banishing of a pain and fear which *opera buffa* simply excludes. Thus his orchestra never parodies the sentiments of the characters, but validates them. When Quickly tells Falstaff that Alice is distracted with love of him and laments over her as a "povera donna", the strings weep in commiseration. The jealous Ford is ejected from comedy altogether during his monologue. His wife's stratagem to reclaim him and reunite them; but the agency which effects this is not a mere practical joke – rather it's a wise, humbling and humanizing demonstration that we are all liable to err. An admission of one's own folly, in this work, entitles one to salvation. *Falstaff*, far from *opera buffa*, comes close to being a *divine comedy*. In this respect Ronald Eyre's production, despite the galling the others have put on him as a compliment not to *Falstaff*, proceeds to convert his *Don Giovanni* and – since at this moment the house lights – all the rest of us to his philosophy of ludic inconsequence. Giulini darkens the score so that this eventual lightening can seem a hard-won, nearly-missed redemption. As a similar experiment with comedy's power to recover from tragedy, Alice takes up Mistress Quickly's narrative of the huntsman – that revenant who, like Mozart's Commendatore, represents the punitive recurrence of eternity in human time – and finishes it as a nonsensical fable, giggling at its facetious terrors. When the characters of *Falstaff* laugh, it's because they are laughing something off. Hence, when the work is played with Giulini's care for detail, the sextuple "No" with which Alice and Nanetta dispute Ford's project to marry the girl to Dr

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In the nineteenth century, comedy comes to be a biological contest: it ordains the survival of the fittest, the Bergsonian freedom of a vital instinct which won't be arrested. The orchestra is where that victory occurs and Giulini, by symphonically congregating the action there, enrolls the singers in its community. Tragedy individualizes, but comedy is about our collective destiny. Therefore, whereas Falstaff stands apart, Giulini marshals the rest of the soloists into two opposed factions, which in the opera's great ensembles – the plotting in Ford's garden, and the search through his house – sing against one another. The antagonistic groups are the men and the women. The women are either, the men, rude earth. The women are comically glib and adroit, the men, immersed in obsession. The women fuss over their domestic lion, the men amass their weapons. The women purvey consolation, the men demand revenge. Cries of feminine comfort from the Alice of Katia Ricciarelli alternate with the howlings of masculine rage from the Ford of Leo Nucci; at the end of the garden scene, Falstaff's bulk turns into the orchestra and then, when the women sing "e poi crepa", noisily deflates male ponderousness, emphasized by female cooing. Falstaff draws near to Shakespeare's evolutionary theory of comedy. Instead of dramatizing the pursuit of man by woman or vice versa, it celebrates the natural law which impels that pursuit. The ensemble in Ford's house is instigated by a sound which is non-musical but which booms music: the kiss from behind the screen where Fenton and Nanetta are in hiding.

Between the male and female quorers, Fenton – here enchantingly sung by Dalmacio Gonzalez – is the mediator. He belongs among the men, but pines for one of the women; and in his tenor voice the war of sexual extremes, divided between the soprano attitudes of Alice and Nanetta and the baritone underground of Falstaff and Ford, is suspended in a truce. Fenton perhaps is wiser even than Falstaff, for while Falstaff traffics in appetite, which satiates itself and suffers exhaustion or expiry, Fenton's sonnet in the final scene appeals of appetite reproducing itself in art. The lover's lips exhalate a musical note which unites in the air with another note. Married and doubled, this musical satisfaction doesn't die but, as Nanetta says, renews itself like the moon. Art, in contrast with the gustatory ephemera on which the fat knight feeds, is the perpetuity of pleasure. The libertine's career, despite Don Giovanni, need not end tragically. Giulini's *Falstaff* admittedly contains no belly laughs: it does, however, enshrine this truth, which is the highest assurance of comedy.

## New Oxford books: Reference

### A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary

Volume III, O-Scz  
Edited by R.W. Burchfield

When the first volume of the Supplement to the OED was published in 1972 the T.L.S. reviewer said that its appearance is no doubt the most important event in English lexicography since the completion of OED itself. Volume II received equal attention and acclaim on its publication in 1978. The third volume takes the Supplement well into the letter S, the most productive letter of the alphabet. The fourth volume, due for publication in 1985, will complete the work. £55

### The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English

Edited by J.B. Sykes

This new edition of the classic single volume dictionary, benefiting from over 100 years of Oxford scholarship (*Good Book Guide*) includes many new words to the language that have come into prominence in the six years since the publication of the radically revised sixth edition, on which it is based. It contains entries for over 40,000 headwords, with a total of some 75,000 vocabulary items including derivatives, compounds, and abbreviations. Seventh edition £7.75, thumb indexed £9.50

### The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Greek

English-Greek  
Compiled by J.T. Pring

This concise English-Modern Greek dictionary is the author's Greek-English dictionary, first published in 1965. Equivalents of English words and phrases are given in colloquial everyday Greek, and the various meanings of English words are carefully distinguished and reflected in the rendering. £6.50

### The Oxford Dictionary of Modern Greek

Greek-English/  
English-Greek  
Compiled by J.T. Pring

This combined volume meets the need for a compact, up-to-date dictionary suitable for general reference and the language student. It is designed primarily for English-speaking users, but will also be a valuable aid to Greek speakers who wish to improve their understanding of English. £9.50

### A Bibliography of Jane Austen

David Gilson

David Gilson's bibliography of Jane Austen was first intended as a revised edition of Sir Geoffrey Keynes's 1928 *Nonesuch Press* bibliography; but while retaining and expanding the original book's structure it is in most respects a new work. £50. *Soho Bibliographies*

### Oxford University Press

## Down and out in Times Square

Alan Jenkins

GEORGE SELDEN  
The Cricket in Times Square  
Illustrated by Garth Williams  
Kestrel, £4.95.  
0 7226 5799 4

A cricket, drawn by the scent of a piece of liverwurst, jumps in a picnic-basket, falls to get out again, and is brought thus from its tree-stump home in Connecticut to a 'garbage-strewn corner of the subway station beneath New York's Times Square.

Things are not as bad as they seem; Chester Cricket is picked up and dusted down in orthodox martian fashion by Mario, (the son of Mama and Papa Bellini who keep the news-stand on the station, then given a bed for the night in a matchbox. The scene is watched by Tucker Mouse, danzen of Times Square's drainpipes (long dry, we presume), who befriends Chester liverwurst snack – and introduces him to the genial Harry Cat. The three strike up an instant rapport.

Things are not as good as they seem; the news-stand business is in a depressed state; Papa prides himself on stocking the "quality" magsazines (*Midwest America*, *Art News*) but can't sell even the *Times* and *Mama* fears the "cricket" feeds on "peculiar diseases". Mario's plea and Papa's kindly resignation to the question "What do we want with a cricket?" the only answer is "What do we want with a news-stand?" prevail, and the cricket becomes a permanent lodger. But all is far from well as yet.

A wise old Chinaman provides a pagoda cricket-cage and some advice on diet – not, however, before Chester has dreamed that he is eating a leaf and munched his way through a two-dollar bill. Tucker, a prudent and prosperous mouse, is called upon to bail Mario out of some heavy-duty grocery deliveries and Chester out of his pagoda jail (he

has the heart of a country-cricket, a Huck Finn of crickets; it is Tucker who finds the thing irresistibly luxurious). A wicker cricket-mouse-cat sort of party precipitates a bigger crisis, though, as things get out of hand and a fire is started.

This time it looks like curtains for Chester, the news-boy's chum; until, that is, kindly Mr Smedley the music teacher discovers the creature's exquisite musical ability and writes to the *Times* a letter vaunting its prodigious genius for "symphonic, operatic and popular tunes". Even Mama's heart melts at Chester's rendering of "Torn-a Sorrento".

Things get even mellow as the letter draws a few curious commuters to Chester's impromptu concert; before long musical America is flocking to hear Aldin for single cricket, and to buy newspapers from the stall. But September comes around, the Huck Finn heart of Chester hankers for the colours of a Connecticut Fall, and he takes his last ride through the New York streets on Harry's back to Grand Central, where he catches the Late Local Express.

Anyone expecting a combination of *Wind in the Willows* and *Archy's Life* will be disappointed. Characterization, human and animal, is thin (though Tucker and Harry rub along in a convincing way), and no single opportunity to inject a wistful or heartwarming note is missed. There are a few good New York touches – Mama's Little Italy inflections are a delight – but too few; the rattle of the subway, the clutter of the news-stand, the meat for a meal in Chinatown and the detailed detritus any agile mouse might reasonably expect to salvage from a subway floor and furnish a drainpipe with, are all George Selden offers by way of realistic backdrop to his fantasy, for which the word is quite definitely "oharming".

The book, first published in 1960, is well on its way to becoming a classic in the United States but the really frightening thing about it now is the innocence of its given world, where a

little boy can be left alone in charge of a news-stand a cat's whisker away from Times Square with money in the cash-register (permanently open), where a sympathetic shuttle-train driver pays twenty-five cents over the top for a newspaper, where a soda-jerk dispenses free strawberry soda to cricket and boy indiscriminately. This is a world which depends for its

existence on a determined assumption of universal niceness, a programmatic ignorance of flesh-pots and peep-shows. Reading *The Cricket in Times Square* we enter a time-war, we cross back over the wall of Eden. As we do reading *Wind in the Willows* (or, for that matter, *Wodehouse* or, in his different way, *Raymond Chandler*); the problem is that here we have

something of the Ratty-Mole scenario with none of the satisfying textures and ironies of their ménage, or the variety and unpredictability of incident that befalls them. Here there is no real danger, no threat or sweat, and therefore no real excitement. The story is all clean, whimsical fun; Mario was brought up according to the lights of an earlier, and vanished, age.

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# Robert Graves

Sir, - Ms Jackson's letter (July 16) about my biography of Robert Graves speaks for itself.

The book has been read because people are interested in Robert Graves; it does not "vilify" her. But while I do not care what abuse Ms Jackson cares to pour out on me, I must comment on the slur on the integrity of my publishers, Hutchinson. This firm would not associate itself with my mere "worthless assemblage of perverse invention".

There is nothing inaccurate in the book about Ms Jackson's later husband. Years did not introduce him to the "Irish Parliament" as "the coming young American poet", but Ms Jackson did, as we know from her miscellany *Epitaph*, and from Graves's diary, celebrate the great Irish poet's demise with a special lunch at Rennes on February 11 1938, having called him "Inuitsonic".

MARTIN SEYMOUR-SMITH.  
36 Hilliers Hill, Bexhill-on-Sea, Sussex.

# Robert Fergusson

Sir, - James Campbell's review of my book *Literature and Gentility in Scotland* (July 16) is largely his own summary of part of the Scottish literary history that the book discusses. The difficulty with this kind of review is that it is not clear to the reader whether the views expressed are those found in the book or those of the reviewer. I should therefore like to make it quite clear that one point at least made by Campbell is not mine but his and that I reject it totally. He says that discussion of Fergusson's poetry often carries the suggestion that writing in Scots was for him a form of high spirits, something he reserved for descriptions of his slumming. My discussion of Fergusson carried no such suggestion, for the reverse is in fact true: Fergusson's Scots poems at their best have a gravitas lacking in his English poems and his high spirits manifest themselves mostly in his burlesque poems in English.

Mr Campbell says that I "boast"

that the text of my book is exactly that of the orally delivered lectures. I did not "boast" of this fact; I simply stated it; the statement could more logically be construed as a confession of laziness.

DAVID DAICHES.  
9 Randolph Crescent, Edinburgh.

# 'The Mathematical Experience'

Sir, - May I muddy a little further the waters in which both Roger Penrose and Jonathan Lear have been wading (Letters, June 25)? Lear says, "a Platonist is a realist who believes that mathematical statements are true or false in virtue of the existence of abstract objects" and also that "an antirealist may believe... that mathematical statements are not true or false independently of human judgment because he thinks that mathematical truths depend in part on complex and deep facts about the structure of the human mind." This appears to overlook, however incidentally, another interesting position, namely that of the antirealist Platonist. He believes that mathematical statements are true only if provable, and false only if refutable, and, moreover, that they are so by virtue (in part) of complex and deep facts about the structure of the realm of abstract objects. The question that immediately arises is how he can deny that every statement is either true or false independently of communicable grounds for such judgments, while yet maintaining that a statement's being provable depends (in part) on the structure of this independently existing realm of abstract objects. But the some difficulty would face Lear's antirealist who substitutes complex and deep facts about the human mind for similar facts about abstract objects.

Lear, however, is right in his criticism of Penrose. It is worth adding to it the observation that Gödel's theorem is constructively provable, hence eminently available to the intuitionist or antirealist for philosophical reflection. Gödel's theorem may reinforce the intuitionist's refusal formally to delimit in advance the admissible methods whereby one can

prove statements about numbers. Indeed, once a formal system is thus prematurely specified, the method of Gödel's proof may be used to produce a statement provably unprovable in that system, but provable in a wider sense not captured by that system. But whether the essential incompleteness of arithmetic forces upon one the view that it's all but certain numbers are abstract objects or because the human mind is a deep and complex thing is not so clear.

N. W. TENNANT.  
Department of Philosophy, University of Stirling, Stirling, Scotland.

# 'Burke's Country Houses'

Sir, - *Burke's Country Houses*, which your reviewer John Buxton (April 30) kindly called "an invaluable collection of photographs", is now facing dominance, if not extinction. The series, of which I am general editor, aims to record 10,000 or so family seats, standing and demolished, in the British Isles, thus far three volumes have appeared and a further three are planned. However, the publishers have been unable to proceed with Volume 4 (covering the North-West) since Savills, the sponsors of Volumes 2 and 3, decided last autumn that they would not sponsor further volumes. New sponsorship has been sought, so far in vain.

Mr Buxton points out that this

series "should help to prevent the destruction, through ignorance, of those smaller manor houses and their like, which... are one of the chief riches in the English heritage, and were the chief source of patronage of the arts". I write in the hope that there may be a patron among your readers who can come forward to save this series.

HUGH MONTGOMERY-MASSINGBERD.  
137 Kennington Park Road, London SE11.

# Roget's Thesaurus

Sir, - Anthony Quinton, in his review (June 4) of the new Longman edition of *Roget's Thesaurus*, is of course perfectly entitled to mention that he was brought up on the Everyman edition. But he writes of the version "put out in 1912 and with revisions in 1925 and 1930", rather implying that Everyman stopped there. He appears to be unaware of the substantially revised new edition which was prepared by D. C. Browning in 1952 ("Every paragraph has been carefully reviewed, over 10,000 words and phrases have been added, and the articles have been 'tidied up' so that all additions follow the logical order which agrees with the original plan"). This was again revised in 1962 and 1971.

ELIZABETH NEWLANDS.  
J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, Aldine House, 33 Welbeck Street, London W1.

# Cats and Ovens

Sir, - Though I can't see that it matters much even in the annals of academic triviality, let me answer a point in Charles Causley's review of *Freedom of the Parish* (May 28) and the letter from Gordon Messing of the Department of Classics in Cornell University (July 16). Charles Causley was wrong in making me author of a remark that kittens born in ovens are not buns. This scornful truism was shot at me by my mother more than sixty years ago, as reported in my autobiographical book *The Crest on the Silver*. So I wasn't copying William Plomer, despite the misquoting of Mr Messing, and William Plomer wasn't copying me, and anyone who speaks of cats, ovens and kittens and buns or biscuits isn't drawing "upon some anonymous hoard of inherited literary wisecracks", only on the common English hoard of useful abstractions.

GEOFFREY GRIGSON.  
Broad Town Farmhouse, Broad Town, Swindon, Wiltshire.

We regret that through an editorial error the title of Ignazio Silone's first novel was given as *Poi e vino* in Filippo Donini's review of *Severina* on April 30. *Pontamara* was Silone's first novel, *Poi e vino* (the correct title) his second.

Transatlantic Book Service are the UK distributors of *The Letters of Arthur Henry Hallam* (£29.25) and *John Tennison's Journal* (£16.25), reviewed in the TLS, May 14.

# Saving the Theatre Museum

Julie Hankey

Anyone who has done theatre research in this country has probably wondered about the cost of flights to Washington and New York. It is a sad irony that here, where our standard in the performing arts is internationally acclaimed, the largest theatre collections we possess should be buried in store or piled up in a few crowded rooms with scarcely a spare corner to look at them in. What is saddest, but typical enough of these cost-effective times, is that the value of having any kind of theatre museum, and of the research that such a museum would make possible, should be regarded as negligible. That in effect is what the paragraph on the Theatre Museum in the Rayner Scrutiny make plain.

Mr Oordon Burrett, who wrote them, obviously thinks that theatrical collections are rather jolly - "attractive" and "delightful" are his words - but he cannot for the life of him see what there is in them to study: "the scope for research which is both possible and fulfilled in this field is also less than in other arts. Perhaps it is less than could be taken through the Theatre Museum's collection of 40,000 books on every aspect of the theatre, if he could examine the boxes of press-cuttings, if he could glance into the prompt-books of Garrick, Kean, Irving, Shaw and so on into the twentieth century, he would see what a vast amount of sheer human history is gathered there."

As surely as in the furniture and china, in the paintings, statues, and artefacts of every kind in other museums, these fragments of the theatre represent what we were and are like. The impact on its first audiences of *Look Back in Anger*, for example, says as much in that way as do the parliamentary debates in Hansard. The performance of a Shakespeare play in the 1930s compared with another of the same play thirty years later measures changes in us of taste and thought and feeling with rare sensitivity. Because the theatre is live, a corporate act involving not only actors and directors but house-full after house-full of public, the tone it takes and the reactions it provokes are a peculiarly immediate reflection of the atmosphere and preoccupations of the day. But by the very nature of the art, these performances, and their audiences are not extant, like

paintings, furniture and Hansard. They can be reconstructed, but only painstakingly, by going through prompt-books, sitting reviews, reading out-of-the-way collections of theatrical reminiscences, looking at pictures, costumes, and scenery - in short by using the resources of a theatre museum. "The scope for research which is both possible and justified in this field" is immense.

But now, if Mr Burrett's recommendations are followed, all the material owned by the Theatre Museum is to remain in limbo, in packing cases or in a dust-sheeted, heap-up, back-stage kind of existence in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Apart from the great loss to the public in general, and to theatre researchers, this puts the Theatre Museum itself into an invidious position. It is under an obligation to make available and to exhibit to their best advantage collections which have been doctored on the express understanding that proper facilities would be found. In 1955, the British Theatre Museum Association donated its holdings, based on the Henry Irving archive; the Friends of the Museum of Performing Arts donated its collection of Daubigny costumes and scenery; in 1973 Dame Bridget D'Oyly Carte made over her material; two unique collections of circus memorabilia, the Hippolyte Cox and the Bertram Mills Collections, were another donation. The list goes on, covering every aspect of the theatre. Most recently, Dame Marie Rambert has made her bequest to the Museum. It is certain that none of these gifts would have been made had there been the least suspicion that in so doing the donors were consigning them to oblivion, and it follows that there is now a legal question as to whether the Museum should continue to hold these collections. Their worth is estimated at £23 million, and there would be eager bidders in America and elsewhere to display them. In anyone wishing to dispose of theatrical material in the future could scarcely do worse than to drop them into Rayner's oubliette.

But until last month, there was never any question but that the Museum would be publicly supported to a building suitable for study and exhibition. In 1971 the government agreed that this should be so, and though cut-backs have prevented progress, the principle has been confirmed by each government since

then. When the Flower Market in Covent Garden became vacant, it was the obvious choice. There, within a couple of minutes of the theatres that figure so prominently in our stage history, and among the tourist-filled shops and cafés, was to be a permanent exhibition telling the story of the English theatre from Shakespeare to the RSC; two rotating exhibitions on particular subjects, as it might be "lighting", "Laurence Olivier" and so on; a small gallery of paintings and sculptures; a seventy-five seat theatre for talks, performances, and workshops; and for researchers, proper study facilities. With a café, a shop, and a bar, the prospect is indeed splendid. It is on that account extremely difficult to write about, because the question of what will work in the long run, given our built-in limbo, is almost coextensive with sociology itself. The, at any rate, is presumably the reason why so few sociologists have been willing to discuss tradition head-on. The most powerful force in human affairs, literally the capacity to hand on and hand over, has been ignored, because you do not know where to begin or end. But there is more to neglect than that. Not only is tradition a subject which enters into almost every other matter of sociological concern. As Shils points out, tradition is a wide-ranging and powerful but it can all be swept under "historical factors" or difficult notions like "national character", or treated as "socialization". And in any case, since it is true that a number of sociologists do not much care for what has been "handed on", their main interest has been in modes of destruction or modification rather than modes of sustenance and renewal. They have been of that faction within the Party of Humanity which tends to the ignition of the library and Mitchinson Collection; and for the study of Shakespeare there are excellent libraries in Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon. But we have no comprehensive theatre museum as such. In that respect London cannot compare with Leipzig, or even Baraboo, let alone with Washington; and yet there are the collections, the plans, the imagination, and, potentially, the building to repair this disgrace.

# Containing the progressives

David A. Martin

EDWARD SHILS  
Tradition  
33pp. Faber, £15.  
0 571 11756 2

There is no doubt that the conventional image of the political stance of sociologists is lop-sided or, to use a northern expression, cack-handed. If you think only of some of the most distinguished practitioners of the discipline, Martin Lipset, Robert Nisbet, Daniel Bell, Raymond Aron, Peter Berger - and Edward Shils - they are best described as liberal conservatives. By that I mean that which they conjoin with a concern for the moral densities and organic one of social life. They respect families, schools, churches, and the network of voluntary association. The same was true of the most important influence of the previous generation, Talcott Parsons. He had a profound sense of the way shared values hold society in being, whatever the importance of political interest and congenial of power.

Edward Shils is the direct heir to the mantle of Parsons. He is a man of fabled learning, whose mind puts powerfully like the moth at dusk. I hesitate to use the word conservative of him because it misses the central concern of his work, which is not conservatism, but the conservation of those human resources and achievements which are richest, and matter most. He cares about continuities and the settled frames within which human beings can put down roots and grow. He detests febrile trendiness, the kind of brittle rationality which misses the reasons of the heart and the reason which propels the pulse of human association. That is why his *T. S. Eliot lectures*, delivered of the University of Kent in 1974, focused on tradition. There is, in Eliot, whether or not you accept his Anglo-Catholic Royalism, a useful prolegomenon of the nature of tradition to which Shils gives here an overt professional expression.

Tradition is about long duration, and about modes of practice and activity which have been worked out against the hard edges of human limitation. It is on that account extremely difficult to write about, because the question of what will work in the long run, given our built-in limbo, is almost coextensive with sociology itself. The, at any rate, is presumably the reason why so few sociologists have been willing to discuss tradition head-on. The most powerful force in human affairs, literally the capacity to hand on and hand over, has been ignored, because you do not know where to begin or end. But there is more to neglect than that. Not only is tradition a subject which enters into almost every other matter of sociological concern. As Shils points out, tradition is a wide-ranging and powerful but it can all be swept under "historical factors" or difficult notions like "national character", or treated as "socialization". And in any case, since it is true that a number of sociologists do not much care for what has been "handed on", their main interest has been in modes of destruction or modification rather than modes of sustenance and renewal. They have been of that faction within the Party of Humanity which tends to the ignition of the library and Mitchinson Collection; and for the study of Shakespeare there are excellent libraries in Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon. But we have no comprehensive theatre museum as such. In that respect London cannot compare with Leipzig, or even Baraboo, let alone with Washington; and yet there are the collections, the plans, the imagination, and, potentially, the building to repair this disgrace.

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up, how is the paradigmatic act formed and fixed, where does the constraining style originate, who are the accredited curators of what is to count as reputable, worthy, wise and deserving of honour? What objects and artifacts enable humans to commune across time and pass what is precious along a chain of being? How do we become historically aligned?

Immediately the questions are posed in this way, one is conscious of the major problem underlying this book, which is to distinguish the differences and the similarities between the various modes of transmission. Part of Shils's object, of course, is to stress the fact that there are vital similarities. The traditions of science, of humane learning, of political procedure and revolution, of artistic practice and style, of craft and all kinds of making, of human association, ritual and of religious faith, all have important elements in common. Neither evolutionary change nor revolutionary upheaval can occur or survive without modes of persistence and storage and settled procedures for securing the alterations achieved. That is why revolutionary societies become extremely traditional. So there is a vast area where all the modalities of maintenance are shared. Even scientific knowledge, especially since Kuhn established the tradition of viewing "normal science" in terms of heaving within established paradigms, can be viewed as work done according to fiercely defended traditions.

But, in that case, what are the differences? What goes on when the Pope defines the Assumption as *de fide* for Roman Catholics is presum-

ably not the same as what goes on when the giving of the Nobel Prize recognizes a new scientific advance. Science has a canon of approved activity and examination, but it does not carry forward Newtonian concepts as such, it retests them. Yet that is not the end of the matter because, on the one hand, religious traditions discard and on the other scientific traditions conserve, so we must ask ways in which discarding and conservation take place. A university has a canon of knowledge at the core of the curriculum of humane learning, but how does the securing of that canon differ from the religious deployment of the canon of sacred scripture?

These are the issues with a multitude of persuasive and illuminating examples in Shils's book. However, in pointing up the common strands that inform all traditions, and in underscoring the importance of tradition as such, Shils has an evaluative as well as a descriptive aim in mind. When he comes to Chapter Nine, "The Prospects of Tradition", and to Chapter Ten, "The Permanent Task", he is really trying to edge our assessments of the dominant tradition of the Enlightenment in a more realistic, balanced direction. In this his objective runs oddly parallel to that of Leszek Kolakowski in his recent book entitled *Religion*. These chapters are plainly prescriptive and directed towards the crisis which afflicts us because of the failures in the Enlightenment programme, whether they are experienced by progressivists or by out-and-out radicals.

Shils is conscious all the time of the huge improvements achieved

through the implementation of the programme advanced by the Party of Humanity. But the contractions in the programme are now clear, the limits exposed, the evil potentialities and excesses realized, and the deeper, less obvious preconditions of the advances more fully canvassed. What Shils wants to argue, given all that may be said for what he calls the previous achievements of the tradition of emancipation, is that these very achievements depended for their function on the continued existence of the elements which they attacked and scorried. In the first place "The success which the Enlightenment achieved was owed to its becoming a tradition". But secondly, and equally important, "It was successful against its enemies because the enemies were strong enough to resist its complete victory over them. Living on a soil of substantive traditionality, the ideas of the Enlightenment advanced without undoing themselves." The programme of the progressivists did not "ravage society as it would have done had society lost all legitimacy".

In other words, traditions contain and therefore make viable the progressive programme. But progressivists easily suppose that it is just this pervasive, undergirding support system which prevents their programme becoming much more fruitful and victorious beyond all shadow of contradiction. So this is why progressivism is so dangerous - dangerous to humanity and itself - not because it seeks liberality or even liberation, but because it does not recognize the frames and continuities on which these aims depend. The weight pressing on the brain of the living is often the underpinning which the past

gives to the very possibility of future. So a conservative in this style, the style of Shils, is not one who wants to hang malfactors and flog little boys, but one whose sense of the possibilities and limits of progress are grounded in the things that progressivists regard as irritants and blockages.

I would append one footnote to this. Shils, for all his attachment to the canon of humane learning, and his exemplification of the canon of sociology, especially Weber, remains an American liberal. He knows how important conservation is and how change rests on continuity, but the rhetoric towards which his mind naturally gravitates for the expression of his deepest convictions is American individualistic liberality. He is, of course, quite unusually aware of the defects, and of the opaque, arrogant blindness exemplified (say) by progressive educationalists, and he spends his intellectual energies picking their pride and predicting their downfall. He is irritated by the appalling, constricted traditionality of their style of thought and their built-in reactions. But he is a liberal all the same. I would describe him as a *mid-atlantic* liberal, not a *transatlantic* liberal. He speaks somewhere of neo-conservatives who nevertheless cannot even really imagine what it would be to unthink the Enlightenment programme. Those are the real transatlantic liberals, and when you talk to them you realize that your deployment of the same words is being organized into different sets, without them knowing it. There is real tradition for you! Shils, of course, can unthink the Enlightenment programme. But as you find he doesn't choose to.

# Constraining the agents

Frank Parkin

PHILIP ABRAMS  
Historical Sociology  
353pp. Open Books. £12 (paperback £6).  
0 729 10111 8

Economical talk about some form of union between history and sociology has been going on for what feels like a long time. Enthusiasts for the marriage have faced a difficult task trying to convince their colleagues of its benefits. It might have been easier for them if they had encountered some exciting opposition; sheer indifference is harder to cope with. Part of the trouble has been that the advocates of a closer union appeared to be a lot stronger on exhortation than on demonstration. If the fusion of historical narrative and social theory was so full of potential, why was no one actually fulfilling it?

In recent years a number of books have appeared which have sought to deliver the goods. Mostly, these have been books by sociologists dealing with big historical events, such as revolutions. Noticeably fewer have been by historians captivated by the charms of sociology. Philip Abrams' posthumously published *Historical Sociology* is the most recent and persuasive attempt so far to advertise these views. Abrams presents a synoptic view of, and lively commentary upon, the work of scholars who think and write about the past in a theoretically informed manner, whatever their disciplinary allegiance. Work of this kind, he suggests, has been produced on a far greater scale than is generally supposed. Many people, it seems, have been writing historical sociology without quite realizing it.

Indeed, it would be difficult for them to avoid doing so, given Abrams's catholic notion of this activity. Historical sociology, he tells us, is not the product of a final triumphant liaison between two erstwhile separate disciplines. There can be no liaison, or any kind of relationship, between history and sociology for the simple reason that, reduced to their essentials, "history and sociology are and always have been the same thing".

They are the same thing in the sense that people who call themselves historians and sociologists employ the same logic of enquiry. The best of them, in fact, seek to explain social events as an outcome of the permanent tension between human agency and the structural constraints that impose limits upon the range of action. The sociologist is forced to take account of the past because all present conduct takes place within a moral and institutional setting bequeathed us by previous generations. Imagine trying to explain the British rice without reference to the legacy of colonialism and plantation slavery.

The historian, in turn, requires a grasp of social theory because past events can only be ordered and comprehended through the conceptual and explanatory devices that theory makes available. Given that past and present are indivisible, and that narrative and theory are wholly complementary, there can be no rational justification for the formal separation of history and sociology in the academic division of labour.

Abrams argues all this with his customary panache and good temper. It is hard to believe, though, that his words will fall as sweetly on the ears of historians as upon the ears of his fellow sociologists. After all, sociologists can hardly avoid examining the past, because what happened earlier this morning is the past in the process of "assimilation". In any case, since it is true that a number of sociologists do not much care for what has been "handed on", their main interest has been in modes of destruction or modification rather than modes of sustenance and renewal. They have been of that faction within the Party of Humanity which tends to the ignition of the library and Mitchinson Collection; and for the study of Shakespeare there are excellent libraries in Birmingham and Stratford-upon-Avon. But we have no comprehensive theatre museum as such. In that respect London cannot compare with Leipzig, or even Baraboo, let alone with Washington; and yet there are the collections, the plans, the imagination, and, potentially, the building to repair this disgrace.

Abrams would deny this on the grounds that history is not just a factual presentation of the past but the social reconstruction of the past. Events cannot be made to speak for themselves; we hear the voices from the past only through the distorting medium of the historian's own accounts. Abrams is thus predictably sceptical of the aims of those historians associated with the History Workshop school. Their dedication to the "recovery of subjective experience" - the interpretation of the past as the action themselves perceived and understood it - is thoroughly misconceived. People in the thick of events, Abrams says, are not always aware of their own motives for action; so that any account of what happened

emanating from this source is a rickety foundation upon which to build an explanation. "The past can only be known through a conscious effort to theorise it." Historians must impose their own meaning upon events, not accept it ready-made from elsewhere. Since they do this anyway, however purely factual they claim to be, Abrams would like them to reflect upon and publicly reveal the theoretical assumptions that lie embedded in their narrative accounts.

There are at least a couple of reasons why historians should pause before accepting Abrams's invitation to enter a state of sociological consciousness. One is that there is nothing resembling a coherent body of social thought waiting to find empirical employment. Sociology is in profound conceptual disarray. There is hardly any common agreement on the definition and use of terms that are supposed to be the discipline's stock-in-trade. More importantly, there are many and conflicting views about the very nature of social knowledge and our capacity for apprehending it.

It should perhaps be said that this state of affairs is neither remediable nor cause for deep despair. Sociology actively thrives upon its own internal contradictions. The endless arguments about the best kind of theoretical apparatus to use in making sense of social reality seem to be of greater fascination than any substantive piece of that reality. Whereas historians appear to regard events themselves as having considerable intrinsic interest, sociologists are likely to be more concerned with how the account of such events might be harnessed to some conceptual or theoretical wrangle. It is engendered within their own discipline. Unlike, say, the church historian, what intrigues the sociologist about the matter of papal succession is how it could be used to fuel the debate about "charisma" or "bureaucracy". Abrams's case for historical sociology contains, in effect, a plea to historians to reorder their priorities along similar lines.

This touches upon the second reason why historians could reasonably decide to shrug off the sociological embrace. Namely, that the kinds of issues defined by historians as problematic would neither be resolved nor clarified by an exhortation into social theory. From Max Weber

onwards, the unhelpful message to the historian from the sociologist has been that what are conventionally treated as social facts are, in large measure, arbitrary creations of the investigator. Facts are not "out there" waiting to be unearthed and explained, they are made visible or concealed by the conceptual lenses through which social reality is viewed in the first place. Replace one set of conceptual lenses by another and a quite different cluster of social facts is brought into focus. Moreover, there is no way of deciding between the conflicting "explanatory" claims of different conceptual lenses or theoretical models. The issue cannot be settled by an appeal to the high court of empirical reality, because each model constructs the factual order in a manner that underwrites its own validity.

Abrams may be right to say that all historical narrative is bound to be organized around some, usually tacit, explanatory model. But it does not necessarily follow that the conscious unveiling of such an apparatus would add very much to our understanding of the Peasants' Revolt or the Dissolution of the Monasteries. There is a case to be made for maintaining a studied indifference to the logic of enquiry that governs our explanatory efforts. Narrative accounts are usually perfectly intelligible without the accompaniment of a decoding device. The business of laying bare the logic of social enquiry is an altogether different activity, conducted for the most part by people agitated by intellectual puzzles of a very different kind from those that worry historians.

It is not too fanciful to suggest, in fact, that social theory is to history as the philosophy of science is to science. Philosophers of science address themselves to the methods and procedures that are said to underlie the activity of science. For their part, the men in white coats cheerfully ignore all this, safe in the knowledge that the noisy exchanges between Popper and Kuhn about what is "really" going on in the laboratories have not the slightest practical bearing on their own endeavours. Historians would be well advised to take a leaf out of the scientists' book and go about their ordinary affairs without troubling too much about the anxieties laid for them by their disciplinary neighbours.

# Among this week's contributors

- OLIVER M. ASHPOLE was editor of the *World Meteorological Organization Bulletin* from 1952 to 1975.
- JOHN BAYLEY is Warton Professor of English at the University of Oxford. His *Shakespeare and Tragedy* was published last year.
- BERNARD BEROZIN's books include *The Turn of the Century*, 1973, and *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, 1977.
- JOHN BURROW is Professor of History at the University of Sussex. His *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* was published last year.
- PETER CHANAO's most recent book is *Television: the Medium and its Messages*, 1981.
- GORDON DONALDSON's books include *Scottish Kings*, 1977.
- DUNCAN FORBES is a Fellow of Clare College, and Reader in the History of Modern Political Thought at the University of Cambridge.
- RICHARD GRENIER is film critic of *Commentary*.
- IAN HAMILTON has recently completed a biography of Robert Lowell.
- GABRIEL JOSIFOVICH's 1981 Northcliffe Lectures *Writing and the Body* will be published later this year.
- WALTER KENOALL's books include *The Labour Movement in Europe*, 1975.
- ISABEL DE MORAES is Professor of Russian Studies at the University of London.
- DAVID A. MARTIN is Professor of Sociology at the London School of Economics.
- KENNETH O. MORRIS's most recent book is *Rebirth of a Nation: Wales 1830-1980*, 1981.
- BRIAN MORTON is features editor of *The Times Higher Education Supplement*.
- REDMOND O'HANLON has recently completed a study of Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin.
- FRANK PARKIN's *Max Weber* was published earlier this year.
- NIALL RUOD is Professor of Classics at the University of Bristol.
- LORNA SAGE teaches English at the University of East Anglia.
- ROGER SCARFON's books include *The Politics of Culture*, 1981, and *Kant*, 1982.
- LOUK VINOGRADOFF edited the correspondence of the Emperors Alexander III and Nicholas II with Prince V. B. Meshchersky for the *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, 1962 and 1964.
- D. A. WEST is Professor of Classics at the University of Newcastle.
- STEPHANIE WEST is a Fellow of Hertford College, Oxford.
- C. M. WOODHOUSE's autobiography, *Something Ventured*, has just been published.



Igor Vinogradoff

CHRISTOPHER DUFFY

Russia's Military Way to the West: Origins and Nature of Russian Military Power 1700-1800. 269pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul. £11.95. 0 7100 0797 3

This is an admirable book. Christopher Duffy has digested a mass of multilingual material (largely Russian and German) to produce a short, readable and well-documented account of the wars which brought Russia into a great European power in the eighteenth century. It may seem strange that no serious attempt has been made to do this before in English, but there is really nothing strange about it. The traditional Russophobia of Europe goes back to the Germany and Poland of the sixteenth century when the first began to dawn on Western Christendom that a new heir to Byzantium was rising in the East.

By an accident of history the first Russian monarch to strike the imagination of the West was Ivan IV, the Terrible. German and Polish fly-sheets and woodcuts popularized the ruler pilloried in the night-mare of the Counter-Reformation and the Protestantism of the Baltic peoples gave a quasi-religious sanction to the bullwark that Poland and the Teutonic peoples were seen to constitute against this barbarous, schismatic monster. Denmark and Sweden dominated the Baltic; Turkey (becked by France) supported Poland. The unique trading link which England managed to establish with Muscovy through Archangel in the middle of the sixteenth century made for profit, not for friendship. Fletcher, Fletchley and Carlewe were typical early English Russophobes who sought revenge for slights or failures experienced in Muscovy by penning or inspiring anti-Muscovite tracts; they were true representatives of average English feelings towards Muscovy than the merchants of the Russia Company with their self-interested gifts of splendid silver to the Tsars; generally speaking, the English looked on the Russians as a savage, xenophobic people, whose ambassadors stank and "people beastly bad".

Duffy has drawn on original sources and recent studies in languages with praiseworthy objectivity and clarity. Hence this excellent short book with first-rate maps and plans, slightly disfigured by one minor defect: the map of the Seven Years War battle maps on p.77 shows Austrian formations black and Prussian shaded; the plans themselves do the reverse.

There is much here to interest the professional specialist in military history, as Duffy's impressive qualifications might lead one to expect; he has taught at Sandhurst for over twenty years and is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of War Studies. But leaving on one side the wealth of detailed evidence he has assembled and analysed concerning the growth and organization of the Russian army in this century - armaments and manuals, training and recruitment, staff work, commissariat, war production, officer corps and peasant soldiers - the principal emphasis of the book is rightly concentrated on the wonderful achievements of an army of illiterate peasants, under officers of very varying quality from had to brilliant, against some of the greatest generals and most formidable armies of the time - Charles XII and Frederick II, the Turks whom they could still beat, the Austrians, the Prussians, and the revolutionary French who were as yet unbeaten anywhere.

There is no space here to retace what is by any standards a most impressive story. Certain points stand out: Russia was huge but under-populated; the armies she could field were never very large, whatever their official strength on paper; they were outnumbered notably by the furiously fanatical Turks. Russia was a technically backward; she learnt the arts of war from enemies such as the Swedes, from foreign generals like

Munnich, Bruce and Lacy, most of all through her own perseverance, typified by Peter and his followers; no monarchy of the time committed so many transitions of newly published foreign works on military science - Burgold, Colburn, Montecuccoli, Vauban and Prince Eugene. Russia's natural resources were undeveloped; by an extraordinary effort she managed to replace and more than double the whole of the artillery lost at Narva (1700) in a single year. Contrary to what might have been expected, Russia never managed to create an adequate force of heavy cavalry during this period, because of a lack of heavy horses. Her lightly mounted Cossacks were for many years a badly disciplined liability rather than a help. Her principal assets lay in gunnery - excellent from the period of the Seven Years War; infantry - the best in Europe in the view of many foreign experts from the middle of the eighteenth century; and a few inspired commanders like Peter's natural son, Romantsov, and Suvorov, the genius of the *Art of Victory*. Feats like Suvorov's epic march in Switzerland in 1799 when he fought his way over four Alpine passes in the face of a superior French army live rarely, if ever, been equalled in the history of warfare.

The only war the Russians did not win was that of propaganda, where, despite all Catherine's efforts, they were never able to match their enemies or convince their allies. Frederick II, Seven Years War, emitted a consistent and successful stream of pamphlets, dressed as history, to denounce Russian "atrocities" and sneer at

Russian incompetence. The fact was that this "scum", whom Frederick's illustrator, Chodowiecki, loved to show as witless mendicants (his models were the relatively small number of prisoners Frederick's Prussians took, only to starve and bully them after capture), smashed Frederick himself at Koenigsberg in 1759 and left him desperate with barely 3,000 men. That they did not take Berlin and end the war victoriously at that time, as Salytkov, their general on the spot, urged, was not their fault; it was the "Miracle of the House of Brandenburg" in Frederick's own words - a consequence of Austria's failure to cooperate and Petersburg's irresolution. As for "atrocities", these were the works of Cossacks and irregular Bashkirs or Kalmucks, who did much harm to Russia's name though they never showed the systematic ruthlessness of Savary or Napoleon's soldiers treated Spain or Russia. Most of them were sent home in 1758 and by Suvorov's time the Cossacks had been turned into a useful scouting force and charged with great effect on the Trebbia and in the Moutathal in 1799. The Russian regulars behaved impeccably in East Prussia during three years of occupation, 1758-1761, when they virtually annexed the province and officers attended lectures by Immanuel Kant, while Prussian *Junkers* fraternized with them. This is not to mention the positive indulgence with which Berlin itself was treated when it was occupied for three days in 1760.

Frederick's propaganda was in tune with the preconceived ideas of most

West Europeans about Russia; that was no doubt why it was so successful both with the great majority of French-influenced "philosophes" and with most old-fashioned European governments and courts; hence the fragility of Russia's friendships and the regularity with which her allies let her down. The fact was no one wanted Russia to make conquests and when she did or looked like doing so, they were aggrieved or frightened, often both. It was in character that Choiseul should be displeased by all her allies, led by George III of England and Hanover, turned against her in the Northern War in 1716. It was equally in character that Austria should keep up a consistent record of frustrating or betraying her Russian ally, whether against the Turks or Frederick or France.

Duffy argues for the theory of continuity in Russian history, the belief that Communism has picked up the traditions of the Tsars. That there are superficial resemblances is obvious. In any deeper sense this will not do. Russia's foreign policy in the eighteenth century was apparently dictated by the whims and volleys of successive monarchs; these usually derived from caution. It must be borne in mind that Russia's major wars and conquests were essentially defensive. Poland, Sweden, Turkey were her hereditary foes. The first two had partitioned her in the time of Peter (1655-1613) and put a Polish pretender and a Polish King on Moscow's throne; the Tartars whom the Turks controlled had repeatedly raided Muscovy in the sixteenth century and made the South of Russia

and the littoral of the Black Sea uninhabitable, till they were subdued by Catherine and Russia's southern border was thus secured. The partitions of Poland were in a sense forced on Russia by Frederick and Kaunitz; Paul would have reversed them if he could and Alexander I did his best to reconstitute a *Polska Restituta* under Russian's aegis. As Sweden, rendered impotent by her anarchic constitution, Russia refused from taking the Grand Duchy of Finland from her, except for a border district, through the eighteenth century, though she could easily have done so in the reign of Elizabeth. Russia could have held on to East Prussia but renounced that valuable province under Peter III. Her victories against the French in Italy were quite insignificant, designed to restore rightful rulers to their thrones and nothing more: legitimism had become a governing principle to Paul I. There was nothing accidental about the Russia of the eighteenth century. Defensive, cautious, in the last resort legitimist, her acquisitions were forced on her by events; they followed naturally from defensive wars.

Disagreement with some of the author's conclusions does not diminish admiration for his scholarship. Two further criticisms must be made, however. It is not clear why Duffy should insist on calling Grand Dukes Grand Princes. The term "Grand Duc" (Grand Duke) was long ago settled by the usage of the Russian Court. Dr Duffy makes a sentimental plea for Paul I: the case against that pitiful paranoiac too strong to be called into question so easily.

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## The laziest of them all

Isabel de Madariaga

ANDRÉ MONNIER

Un Publiqueur Froidement sous Catherine II: Nicolas Novikov 388pp. Paris: Institut D'Etudes Slaves. 2 7204 0175 7

Considering the importance of Novikov's role in the intellectual history of Russia it is astonishing that so little attention has been devoted to him by Western scholars. André Monnier's study is thus very welcome, even though he limits himself severely to the first stage in Novikov's life as a publisher, namely the years 1769-74.

It is by now well-established that the sudden proliferation of satirical journals in these years, spearheaded by the appearance of *All Sins of Things*, edited by Catherine II's secretary G. Kozitsky, was largely sustained by raids on German and French translations from the British journals, principally *The Spectator*. Novikov's first satirical weekly formed an exception: in that most of the material was either written by himself or by mainly identifiable collaborators.

But more than any of the other weekly (*Moscow*, *This and That*, *Neither This nor That*) the very title he chose echoes the literary form inaugurated by *The Spectator* - the editor who attends aside and watches, or in the case of Novikov, *The Drone*, "leader" than the laziest of Spaniards, whose only hope of being useful to society lies in publishing the work of others. (Mey one perhaps see here an allusion to the fact that Novikov was expelled from Moscow University for laziness?)

Almost at once *The Drone* stood out among the other reviews by the edge it gave to its satire. Novikov's targets were corrupt and idle officials, judges who took bribes, nobles who oppressed or tortured their peasants, gnomes, ignorant men and frivolous girls. Monnier also draws attention to the hitherto unstressed aspect of his satires: its virulent misogyny, illustrated by the disproportion between the cruel diatribes against old and young coquettes and the milder ones against *malines* (four to one), and by the publication in four-and-a-half issues of his third journal, *The Painter*, of a Russian translation, in verse, of the Bolleau's dreary satire on women. Unfortunately so little is known

about Novikov the man that there is no means of detecting what personal experience developed in him this unpleasantly caricatured antisocialism.

Where Monnier's account diverges substantially from Soviet criticism is in his rejection of the thesis that Novikov was an "enlightener". He emerges from these pages as a proto-slavophile, a Solzhenitsyn, not a Sakharov. The main burden of his criticism is moral, not political. He does not want to change the institutional structure; he does not, for instance, attack the system of serfdom or such only cruel and oppressive owners. Monnier draws attention here to the development of nationalism of Novikov, to the way in which his satire poets not to a better future but to a better past. Where was this past? On the only occasion where Novikov is actually specific, it is pre-Petrine. There is even *The Painter* a passage extolling the maxims of the medieval book of household precepts, the *Domostroy*: "Let the woman fear her husband." Otherwise Novikov seems to regard with approval the 1730s and 1740s, when German intellectual influence predominated in Russia. There is a whole abeyance between this Novikov and the anticlerical, libertine, Voltairian, materialist "enlighteners" so beloved of Soviet critics, and Monnier's analysis, based on a purely literary scrutiny of what Novikov wrote or published, is on the whole convincing.

Monnier also adopts a non-Soviet position regarding the controversy between Catherine II and Novikov. In common with the English expert on Novikov, W. J. G. Jones, he argues that Novikov and the other editors took for granted that Kozitsky was the actual editor of *All Sins of Things*. Indeed Catherine's connection with the journal was not known until P. Bekarevsky discovered it in the 1860s. It was only after that date that the theory of the polemic between Novikov and Catherine (Chernyshevsky struggling against Alexander I?) took wing.

The polemic centred around the nature of satire. Catherine/Kozitsky argued in favour of generalized satire, against vices, Novikov preferred more specific human targets. Catherine lauded this portrayal in Soviet criticism as "looking ahead". Much of the interpretation collapsed when it was discovered that the theory of satire approved by Catherine was based on that of *The Teller* and *The Spectator*. Even so, to the words of the leading

Soviet specialist in this field, Yu. D. Levin, the political moderation of Addison and Steele, their "gentlemanly humour", their rejection of satire against the person, was the considered result of their rejection against the violent party strife of the time. In Levin's view, lampoons and libels were to England the instrument of a "right-wing feudal aristocracy", whereas in Russia the rejection of satire against the person acquired the character of a defence of absolute government against criticism from the left.

Monnier's defence of the view that Novikov was aiming his shafts primarily at Kozitsky is on the whole convincing. The rude and even coarse remarks directed at elderly ladies who could not write Russian were aimed at the editorial persona of *All Sins of Things*, "granny". It was against the accepted canon of the time, however, to indulge in personal abuse of the sovereign (except when drunk). Novikov was certainly capable of personal abuse, of satire against the person, as in his treatment of the playwright Lukin, or the author Chulikov (both, incidentally, noble). But one may search in vain for attacks on identifiable magnates. Monnier suggests that Novikov made many enemies of court, but the really important magnates simply did not feel they were under attack and could afford to agree (as did Catherine) with satires on corrupt officials or cruel landowners, since in their own estimation they were better.

It is when he moves from literary analysis to the historical and social background that Monnier's book gives rise to serious reservations. He falls himself into the trap he accuses modern Soviet critics of falling into: of making assumptions - based on insufficient evidence and then building up a whole theory on them. This is particularly striking in his treatment of the censorship, which he repeatedly blames for delays in publication, or (which G. Jones has shown to be unwarranted) He is evidently quite unaware that the official presses on which the journals were printed were off-Sumarokov for rudeness to a named person in a satire printed on the Academy Press. Her reason was that she might be assumed to have agreed with him.

Monnier's picture of the Russian political and social background is also somewhat askew. The works he has consulted for background are astonishingly out of date, the most recent being a French popular biography of 1966. As a result he is frequently wrong on important and unimportant facts, and too ill-informed to assess the lack of foundation for some of his theories. To give but one example, he suggests that Novikov, Nikita Panin (the leading figure in the circle of the Grand Duke Paul when the latter's majority was imminent), was attacking Catherine at Paul's instigation in 1772 because her "brutal" behaviour in Poland was embarrassing Frederick II, "a ruler whose alliance Russia was seeking". As though Frederick and Catherine were not, at that time, already more than allies, indeed accomplices in crime!

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## Pointed particulars

D. A. West

RICHARD JENKYNs

Three Classical Poets: Sappho, Catullus and Juvenal. 233pp. Duckworth. £24. 0 7156 1636 6

"There is do with the purity of a good woman", claimed Wilamowitz, whereas the modern scholar finds in Sappho's poetry such horrors as "a cognate exemplum set in an exoticism". Richard Jenkyns, after his excellent book, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, is in his element in giving such excesses in their cultural setting.

Only one complete poem of Sappho survives, and yet she has always been judged a great poet. Jenkyns tests this judgment and finds it true. For example, where the blessed goddess of love has just come in answer to Sappho's prayer on her golden chariot drawn by sparrows - "You smiled on me with your immortal face and asked, 'What is it this time? Why are you calling me today? What is it you're wanting for more than anything else? What are you out of your mind? Who is alive to win back to your love? Who is doing you wrong this time?'"

Sappho - Aphrodite's divine radiance and her amused affection for Sappho, the quick tone of this in the shifting tenses of the poem, this is all beautifully lit for us by Jenkyns. He is very good too on Sappho's sensory richness, as when Aphrodite is summoned to the orchard, "where the cold water chatters through the branches of the apple tree" (a merging of three senses as the sound filters down to Sappho as she lies dozing under the trees). "And the whole place is a daisy-blossom" (surprisingly) "and the leaves quiver with light and deep down from them." Jenkyns puts moralling and symbolism and obfuscation in their places and leads us firmly to see that this limpid Greek is a compact of sense and tone and an unassailable quality that is distinctively

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*A Catalogue of the Compositions of S. Rocheminoff* by Robert Threlfall and Geoffrey Norris (218pp. Scholar Press. £30. 0 85967 617 X) lists the title and style of each work, with dates, dedications, instrumentation and key; text and libretto; publication history; manuscript sources; the composer's own recordings; notable performances; and arrangements by himself or made with his sanction.

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# Bargaining with the Devil

Richard Grenier

MICHAEL R. MARRUS and  
ROBERT O. PAXTON

Vichy France and the Jews  
432pp. Harper and Row. £9.50.  
04363 09005 2

In May, 1926, a mild-mannered Yiddish poet named Scholem Schwartzbard shot and killed the Ukrainian leader Semyon Petliura in Paris in revenge for the tens of thousands of Jews murdered by Ukrainians in pogroms during the Russian Civil War. After a sensational trial, Schwartzbard, in consideration of the sufferings of his people, was acquitted by a compassionate French jury. Twelve years later, in 1938, a seventeen-year-old German Jew named Herschel Grynszpan shot to death the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath, also in Paris. But Grynszpan enjoyed little of the sympathetic indulgence that had so favoured Schwartzbard. Not only did French police instantly seize him, they also seized his aunt and uncle, who were sentenced to six months in prison for harbouring an illegal alien. In Hitler's Germany, the vom Rath assassination triggered the anti-semitic rage now known as the *Kristallnacht*, and in France as well angry anti-semites rushed forward, calling for harsh measures against Jews, particularly Jewish silents. Grynszpan's case was overtaken, first by war, then by the French defeat, and he was finally turned over to the tender mercies of the Nazis. But what had happened to French public opinion in twelve short years? This is a question of compelling interest in all of us, since Jews, unwillingly (I can hardly think they sought the role), have for some time served as barometers of a society's social and psychic health. Let us say, when mobs surge through the streets screaming "Death to the Jews!", that the body politic is not well.

*Vichy France and the Jews* by Michael Marrus of the University of Toronto and Robert Paxton of Columbia is a quite brilliant work giving in fascinating detail the origins and evolution of Vichy's Jewish policies and the support – and sometimes aversion – these policies called forth in the French population. "Anti-semitism burgeoned in France during the decade before Vichy," they write. "The government of Pétain did not invent the anti-Jewish program it so earnestly and eagerly put forward in 1940. Every element of this program was present in the years preceding the fall of the Third Republic."

To a large degree French anti-semitism of the late 1930s was a backlash from the outstandingly generous position France had taken during the refugee crisis of the same decade. France took in more refugees than any other country in the world – more than double the number taken in by the United States – and was the only country to support them from public funds. Of the estimated 300,000 Jews in France when war broke out, at least half were foreign, and of the half that were French citizens many had been naturalized only shortly before. So the precarious upsurge in French anti-semitism was part of, and confused with, a generalized xenophobia, quite unlike the Nazis' biological racism. It must also be remembered, in terms of popular thinking, that it was still a pre-Keynesian world. Every refugee was seen as stealing a job from a French worker, as well as diluting French culture and, if a Jew, as possessing a special animus against the Nazis, likely to cause trouble with Germany. The vom Rath assassination brought renewed French-German tension just six weeks after Munich.

Marrus and Paxton are particularly lucid on the history of anti-semitism, a subject on which Marrus has written well before. Anti-semitism has been associated with remarkably different intellectual currents, from clericalism to socialism to nationalism. "Anti-Jewish images permeated like a gaseous current beneath the cultural surface," they write, "periodically changing in composition, sometimes kept down by external pressures, then sometimes bursting forth, after having mingled explosively with some

economic or social issue." The issues in the 1930s were fairly obvious: the world economic depression and the menace of Nazi Germany.

The major historic fear of anti-semitism was, alas, Christianity, according to whose doctrine the Jews were the object of that most unspeakable of charges: deicide. As Christian fervour receded in the nineteenth century, inventive theorists undertook to do what intellectuals, unfortunately, have always done best, to provide, as the authors say, "sophisticated and clever reasons for people to believe what they already believed": i.e. that animosity against Jews was justified. In France, the Left was snooty in the van, with such distinguished early socialists as Proudhon and Fourier attacking Jews as the very symbols of capitalism, bourgeois society, their antipathy running parallel to the corrosive anti-semitism of a not unknown German-Jewish socialist named Karl Marx. Later, anti-semitism came to be called "the socialism of fools." The link between socialism and anti-semitism survived even into Hitler's time, with the left wing of the National Socialist Party (for it originally did have a left wing) making much of Jews as capitalist bloodsuckers. And, of course, it has found a new bastion in our day, in a period not covered by the present work. With anti-semitism throughout the capitalist and "mixed-economy" West dropping to historically unprecedented levels, it has maintained itself, in Europe, only in the totalitarian-Marxist societies of the Soviet sphere.

In the nineteenth century, he said, socialists at no time had a monopoly on substantial popular hostility among the peasant and artisan classes, and in a more refined form among the conservative elite. And racism, that illegitimate offspring of Darwinism, was soon to prove a godsend to those seeking a rationalization for anti-Jewish hatreds on the nationalistic Right. Towards the end of the century Paris, according to a recent study, became "the spiritual capital of the European Right", and these new anti-democratic agitators held Jews responsible for everything that ailed the French Republic: materialism, greed, corruption, scandal. Despite their most determined efforts, however, the support of the bulk of the French popular press, the pro-Dreyfus forces, won in that titanic crisis and French anti-semitism and racism went into a sharp decline. Marrus and Paxton estimate that in 1930, to fact, "polite" anti-semitism of the social exclusionary sort was stronger in Britain and the United States than it was in France. In 1930, great American universities still faithfully excluded Jews from their faculties; for example, a practice that had become unthinkable in France, as indeed in Weimer Germany. Then came the Depression, Hitler, and within a decade, the holocaust.

Marrus and Paxton's central thesis is that the raw statistics of the holocaust, nation by nation, have misled historians into believing that Vichy France conducted a stout defence of "its" Jews. After all, the reasoning goes, some 90 per cent of the Jewish population were annihilated in Germany, Austria, Poland, the Baltic states, and the Bohemian Protectorate. The figure for White Russia and the Ukraine is 85 per cent; for the Netherlands, 75 per cent; France is down at the bottom of the list with 25 per cent, bettered principally only by Germany's privileged ally, Italy, with 20 per cent, and by Finland and Denmark, whose tiny, highly integrated Jewish populations got off scot-free. Marrus and Paxton present an overwhelming case that these figures were the result of the fortunes of war. Wherever the Germans were present in strength and able to apply their power, the Jews were destroyed. Italy openly sabotaged its own anti-semitic edicts until the fall of Mussolini and the occupation of the northern part of the country by Germany. Hungary, also, had a better record than Vichy until the last year of the war, when the Germans took administration into their own hands. The Nazis had a

pathological dread of Jewish populations in the immediate rear of their armies, which helps to explain their ravages both in the east and in the west. In Britain, Holland, a "Germanic" nation, also had the misfortune of being slated for incorporation into the Third Reich, requiring, of course, that it be *Judenrein* (Jew-free). The authors are unquestionably right when they say that, if the tide of battle had gone differently, and the Germans had had the available man-power, they would have exterminated the Jews of France as they did the Jews of Poland, and no Pétain or Laval would have stopped them.

The study then focuses on a somewhat different issue: given the narrow range of options, and the prospect that all might be futile in the case, did Vichy at least do its best to shelter France's Jewish population from the horrors of the Final Solution? The widely believed answer to this is France has been yes. But Marrus and Paxton's reply is a resounding no. On its own initiative, and with no prompting whatever from Berlin, Vichy introduced in the first months after the defeat a whole array of anti-semitic measures that completely destroyed the position of Jews in French society: race decrees (more stringent than those applied by the Germans in Occupied France), dismissal of Jews from government positions, exclusion of Jews from the professions and higher education. Again on its own initiative, Vichy interned in camps thousands of foreign (but not French) Jews. When the Final Solution began, Vichy volunteered to round up and turn over to the Germans foreign (but again not French) Jews from the Unoccupied Zone. For Marrus and Paxton, the most needless and chilling act of all seems to have been the stamping on every Jewish identity and ration-card of the single word: "Jew".

Still, despite the stunning rise of anti-semitism in France in the decade before the war, it is notable that the authors do not attribute Vichy's racist measures to active malice against Jews on the part of the government's leaders. Pierre Laval, his part, Laval, they write, "assumed that the German authorities would be grateful to the French for pursuing a parallel anti-Jewish policy, and would respond by yielding greater authority to France over this and other spheres of national activity". This bargaining advantage, the authors themselves say, "seemed likely". They grant that Laval refused to compel Jews of the Unoccupied Zone to wear the yellow star at a time when the Germans had made it obligatory in the north. They are influenced by the charge of double standard, the war Laval rebelled against, Germans in August, 1943, and refused to strip recently nationalized French Jews of their citizenship – which would have left them exposed to Nazi

depredations. The authors seem to accept that the cornerstone of the Laval policy was to abandon foreign and stateless Jews to the Nazis in the hope of protecting French Jews, particularly the native born, and that in this he had some success. They acknowledge, finally, that the SS had expected to deport all 300,000 Jews of France towards their final Solution by the end of 1943, but that it was only able to reach some 20 per cent of this figure and felt Laval must be "dragging his feet". But foot-dragging is not enough for Marrus and Paxton. Vichy France, although a crushed, defeated nation, still had "allegiant attributes of sovereignty", they say. Laval should have stood up to the Nazis. He should have tried to save, not only French Jews, but foreign Jews; not only some Jews, but all. He should have called the Nazis "bluff" – the authors' word.

Now no one claims that Vichy was a glorious page in French history. France, despite the growth of insidious tendencies during the 1930s, had entered the war as the custodian of many noble traditions – the Rights of Man, tolerance, hospitality – and succour to victims of oppression – but in the misery and demoralization of defeat, these had gone. Vichy policies were reactionary and, in many ways, contemptible. They were hostile to Protestants, Freemasons, Communists, Jews, and violently hostile to foreign minorities. Laval heartlessly turned over to the Germans not only foreign Jews, but veterans of the Spanish Republic army and even German refugees who had fought for France in the war against Hitler (here was a violation of a sacred trust). Measures against Communists were easiest to understand, as during Vichy's first year Nazi-Soviet friendship was still in bloom and the French Communist leader Maurice Thorez, safe in Moscow, was openly exulting in the German victory.

But Laval's efforts on behalf of the bulk of the French population were considerable. For most French citizens the "real" deportation was the conscription of young Frenchmen as industrial workers in Germany, the levies for which Laval fought doggedly to keep to a minimum. Some time after he was executed by firing squad, records came to light in the archives of the Third Reich indicating that the Germans had considered Laval duplicitous and untrustworthy (from their point of view), always threatening that every attempt to levy Frenchmen into the Resistance. Laval's efforts on behalf of French Jews were also appreciable. On a continent fanatically extruding Jews from native populations almost everywhere, Laval continued to consider French Jews as Frenchmen. He had been twice prime minister of the Third Republic, haven of liberty, equality, fraternity. All that was gone and he was now totally callous to foreigners, but he was still prime minister of France, bargaining with the Devil, trying to save his own. Ha

## Wring Your Hands

Wring your hands, curve them like the river.  
The laughing willow calls me  
To where the cranes are flying over the Larna.  
Epithetismal, in love, flooding its banks.  
Their clear path is Alkambra, Rio Ebro,  
Calabria, coloured, with its  
Huge clouds of alabaster.  
Back – into the deluge, the laughter, the oblivion.

Moscow, 1969.

Eugene Dubnov

Translated from the Russian by the author and C. Newman

# Swallowed by the sea

Redmond O'Hanlon

JOHN HARRIS

Without trace: The last voyages of  
eight ships  
244pp. Eyre Methuen. £7.50.  
0413 46170 X

In 1926 the Chuky, a 7,000-ton, five-year-old freighter, built in Glasgow, was making an unremarkable passage towards Japan with a cargo of copper concentrate. After a morning chat with her captain on the bridge, the chief engineer walked aft along the catwalk. A shotgun, of smallish bore, it seemed, was then discharged behind his head. Turning round, he was just in time to see the bow section of the ship in open self away from the stern, roll over, and sink so quickly that even the men on the open bridge were carried down. His own truncated section remained aloft only long enough to lower a boat and to get clear with the ship's dog.

Joseph Conrad had imagined it all before: Jim, remembering himself deep in the Patna, tells Marlow, "Dash it all! I tell you it bulged. I was holding up my lamp along the angle-iron in the lower deck when a flake of rust as big as the palm of my hand fell off the plate, all of itself. . . . The thing stirred and jumped off like something alive while I was looking at it." And Jim "could depict to himself without hindrance the sudden swing upwards of the dark skyline, the sudden tilt up of the vast plain of the sea, the swift still rise, the brutal fling, the grasp of the abyss, the struggle without hope, the starlight closing over his head for ever like the vault of a tomb. . . . And so it must have seemed, say, at various moments of sharp but brief terror, from January 1961 to January 1971, to the crews of the seventy merchantmen who were officially posted missing at Lloyds; and to the passengers and crew of the SS *Nararah*, lost without trace in 1909, and USS *Cyclops* (1918), whose disappearances are here considered in detail. But the eye-witness account from the Chuky provides the probable explanation of their ends: sulphurous cold in fire-room bunkers (which are rarely empty and are rarely inspected) can corrode away the I-beams, the stiffening girders, unexpectedly fast: the first pair of waves which roll neatly under a ship fore and aft, leaving the weak spot unsupported, will crack it, equally neatly, in two.

At the beginning of *Heart of Darkness* Marlow recalls some of the great men and ships borne out to sea on the Thames, and John Harris's book, simple and straightforward good, incidentally points out the Cornish irony for us. The river, Conrad writes: "had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled – the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of

time, from the *Golden Hind* returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen's Highness and then pass out of the gigantic tale, to the *Erebus* and *Terror*, bound on other conquests – and that never returned.

The double-hulled HMS *Erebus* and HMS *Terror*, fitted with the new auxiliary steam-engines, lavishly equipped, and commanded by Sir John Franklin, who had served with Nelson at Copenhagen, and distinguished himself as signal midshipman aboard the *Bellerophon* at Trafalgar, were anchored from Greenhithe on May 15, 1845. The well-organized expedition was soon to complete the mapping of the few hundred miles of uncharted Arctic coastline and to sail through the undiscovered Northwest Passage to the clear Pacific; or so it was thought.

As Sir John Barrow, Secretary of the Admiralty, remarked, there could be "no objection with regard to any apprehension of the loss of ships or men"; and the Lords of the Admiralty considered that with "the facilities of the screw propeller and other advantages of modern science, the expedition may be attended with great results". Great results there certainly were. But *Terror* and *Erebus*, the primeval heart of Darkness sprung from chaos, with a little help from an external nature which could still be more than a match for Victorian science, in Conradian fashion moved inward, rather than outward, to enclose their subject crews.

Franklin and his ships were last seen by two whalers, *Prince of Wales* and *Enterprise*, on July 12, 1845, near Lancaster Sound. Made fast to an iceberg on which they had set up an observatory, the men were comfortably camped, in high spirits, and were even producing their own newspaper.

By 1848, spurred on by the colossal sum of £20,000 of Admiralty prize money and a further £5,000 offered by Lady Franklin, fifteen expeditions had set out to find them. But it was not until 1850 that an official squadron under the command of Captain Horatio Austin found the remains of Franklin's first camp. One set of sledge tracks led into the interior. There were vague Eskimo stories of men with epaulettes who, surprisingly, died like ordinary mortals when struck by harpoons, and even when stuck in the guts by otter-darts.

One of Austin's captains, Robert le Mesurier McClure of HMS *Investigator*, climbing to a 600-foot knoll to survey Franklin's possible routes, was astonished as he gazed to the North and saw nothing but the sea: the Northwest Passage had been discovered. And the next day, in pursuit of the main purpose, he was lucky again: shooting a large polar bear he opened up its stomach with his skinning knife to disclose as yet

undigested raisins, pieces of tobacco leaf, bits of pork fat cut into cubes and lengths of surgeon's sticking-plaster.

But nothing much else was discovered until 1854, when Dr John Rae, Chief Factor of the Hudson's Bay Company, whilst mapping the west coast of Boothia, came across an Eskimo who told him that about forty white men sledges over the ice after their ships had been beset. Later, the graves and bodies of about thirty white men had been discovered on the mainland, some in tents, some outside, others under an upturned boat. Only one man, fully clothed, had a double-barrelled gun, and a telescope, beside him. Conrad's cannibal Falk could not have done better.

The mystery of the *Mary Celeste*, however, is the most famous of them all. And here I must tell you, by way of light relief, that my twenty-fourth brother-in-law, with a beard to his waist which entitles him to know about such things, has his own theory. Recalled, and oppressed, he says, by that circular boredom of the seas which can come at any time and in any place from Tilbury to Takarua to the Tasman Sea, the crew of the *Mary Celeste* laid bets on the winner of a swim round the ship. As they rounded the stem, there came a puff of wind. And another. Several hundred thousand dog paddles later, in fact, the *Mary Celeste* was off to scare the bell-bottomed pants off all she met; and they were off to nowhere in particular.

But this superior explanation for the unexplained sink in full sail in mid-Atlantic, together with previous and competing hypotheses of a Coleridgean brush with an anti-personnel ghost ship; or the suckers of a giant squid blocking the halfway and inviting themselves to supper; or a Wellerian popping through an elbow-hole in the sleeve of time; or the dugong song of a siren; or even simple everyday mass drunkenness, murder, solitary-deck-swallowing and suicide, are convincingly discounted by Mr Harris. The Captain's breakfast egg was not still steaming from its opened top upon the cabin table; the ship was storm-rigged, and had shipped a sea; the crew had taken to the boats and been lost, the ship survived.

Harris also discusses the last hours of the USS *Maine* (hardly lost without trace) which was blown up in Havana harbour on the night of February 15, 1898, not by a cunningly placed Spanish mine (an assumption which helped to start the Spanish American War) but by spontaneous combustion to a coal bunker close to the fore. The magazine and the fate of the USS *Maine*, found abandoned in the Pacific in 1953. But it is the story of the *Telugumoth* Electron which, once again, beneath the simple account, seems to part-engine the sub-

conscious, to generate a Conradian resonance.

On the morning of July 10, 1969, the Rymal Mail vessel *Piccard*, bound from London for the Caribbean, sighted a small yacht ghosting along at about two knots with only a mizen sail raised. She stopped her engines, and lowered a boat to investigate: the yacht was found to be abandoned; dirty plates filled the cabin sink; the parts of disembowelled radio receivers were strewn everywhere; a soldering-iron was still balanced on a can of milk. But there seemed to be plenty of food and water, a life-raft was lashed on the deck, the lowered sails were neatly folded. And only the chronometer was missing from its case.

From the three log-books left in a neat pile on the chart-table it transpired that Donald Crowhurst, unsuccessful small businessman and amateur yachtsman of little experience, competitor in *The Sunday Times* single-handed race around the world which he appeared to be heroically winning with a series of remarkable times, had in fact traced a different and altogether more private course, a voyage of self-discovery which spider-webbed around itself in a seldom-visited part of the South Atlantic.

But why did he take his chronometer with him? Well, Conrad, it seems, knew about that too: "starting out on a voyage" he remembered

was like being launched into Eternity. I say advisedly Eternity instead of space, because of the boundless silence which swallowed up one for eighty days – for one hundred days – for even yet more days of an existence without echoes and whispers. Like Eternity itself. For one can't conceive a vocal Eternity. An enormous silence, in which there was nothing to connect one with the Universe but the incessant whealing about of the sun

and other celestial bodies, the alternation of light and shadow, eternally chasing each other over the sky. The time of the earth, though most carefully recorded by the half-hourly bells, did not count in reality.

Captain Brierly, the outwardly impeccable man of honour and high ideals who is softly degenerate inside, whose sympathetic identification with the Jim he judges has revealed to him his own inner lack of innate, biological courage, also commits "his reality and his shame together to the keeping of the sea". The boatswain's mate calls to Brierly's second-in-command as the ship passes to the north of the Hector Bank, "Will you please come aft, Mr Jones," he says. "There's a funny thing. I don't like to touch it." It was Captain Brierly's grid chronometer watch carefully hung under the rail by its chain.

"I see what I am," Crowhurst wrote in his log, "and I see the nature of my offence. . . . It is finished – it is finished IT IS THE MERCY." And there is also Crowhurst the would-be ingenious electronics engineer, his track of life tangled across the surface of the uncharted ocean in a self-made circuit diagram of sixteen thousand solitary miles, an outward game which rang inner rings round him: "Nature does not allow God to Sin any Sins except one," he concluded, "That is the Sin of Concealment. . . . I will play this game when I choose I will resign the game. . . . It might be the sceptical games-playing Decoud in *Nostromo*, all alone in a "world of cloud and water, of natural forces and forms of nature" who at last "beheld the universe as a succession of incomprehensible images" and, having already been engulfed by his own mind, completed his descent into the outer Placid Gulf of the sea, where, "swallowed up in the immense indifference of things" he also "disappeared without a trace".

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## Cartographer's course

Oliver M. Ashford

NORMAN J. W. THROWER  
(Editor)

The three voyages of Edmond Hood Halley in the *Parame* 1698–1701.  
Two volumes. 392 pp, with a portfolio of maps. Hakluyt Society. £20.  
0504 180 02 6

Towards the end of 1985 many of us will be searching the night sky for the glimpse of Halley's comet, which on its last spectacular appearance in 1910 aroused much admiration and awe. The more curious may then wish to know more about the man after whom the comet is named. Edmond Halley was born in 1656 and was thus a few years younger than Samuel Pepys and Isaac Newton, both of whom held him in great respect. Although he is now remembered primarily as the first astronomer to predict successfully the return of a comet, he also made

meteorology, navigation and cartography. His chart of the trade winds, published in 1686, has been acclaimed as the first meteorological chart, while his Atlantic chart, which appeared round about 1701, is considered to be the first printed map with isolines – it contained lines of equal magnetic declination (the angle between true north and magnetic north).

More information about these achievements and other aspects of Halley's life and work is lucidly presented in the scholarly eighty-page introduction to Norman J. W. Thrower's timely publication. But to reproduce the journals of three voyages which Halley made in the *Parame* between 1698 and 1701, which have been claimed by Sydney Chapman as the first sea-journeys "undertaken for a purely scientific object". The journal of the third voyage, which was confined to the English Channel and resulted in the publication of the first tidal chart, has not previously been published. The journals of the two earlier voyages in

the Atlantic are compared with Dairymple's earlier published versions, and Halley's charts of the Atlantic and the Channel are reproduced in facsimile in a portfolio which constitutes Volume Two of this important work.

The book's main appeal will of course be to those interested in the history of the scientific exploration of the oceans. But the introduction will also prove to be an authoritative source on Halley himself – there will be no excuse if in 1985 one of England's greatest scientists is presented to the public solely as an astronomer. Thrower suggests that but for his "unclerical attitude if not for his liberal views on religion" Edmond Halley would have been given a public memorial in England which adequately represents the estimation in which he is held – his tomb might be in Westminster Abbey instead of in the church of St Margaret at Lee, where it is apparently "in a state of disrepair and even difficult to find". Let us hope that this situation will be remedied before his comet is once again an object of admiration.



## Seeking to prosper

Gordon Donaldson

WILLIAM R. BROCK

*Scotus Americanus: A survey of the sources for links between Scotland and America in the eighteenth century.*  
293pp. Edinburgh University Press.  
£10.  
0 85224 420 7

Over the past generation and more a good deal of work has been done on both sides of the Atlantic on the links between Scotland and America in the eighteenth century, but most of it has produced either general (and sometimes superficial) surveys or narrowly specialized studies. William Brock's admirably planned book, which for the first time gives systematic treatment to the whole vast field, is one of the most important and useful works on any aspect of Scottish emigration.

The volume has eight chapters and a "Retrospect". The chapters have titles like "The Glasgow Tobacco Trade", "The Highland Migration" and "Faith, Education and Intellect", and each, if it does not fall precisely into two parts, represents a dual approach, one directed at giving a straightforward account of the topic and the other at evaluating the relevant sources.

The passages which present the general picture of each topic cover familiar ground, but they are a model of lucid and succinct exposition in straightforward English and incorporate many apt, novel and lively illustrative details from the source material, not least in the form of quotations from letters, which at once bring the reader into touch with individuals. Brock's readers are never likely to forget that the history of emigration is the history of the lives of countless individuals - at any rate, as he reminds us, those about whom information has been able to survive. "The hundreds of young men who went out... as factors, storekeepers, assistants, clerks and bookkeepers, left voluminous but uneven evidence of their work and problems", but "the annals of the poor are disappointingly thin".

Brock looks back before 1707, when the Scots "in sacrificing independence had gained an empire", to earlier

indications of the "process by which the people of a small, poor but vigorous country sought opportunity to prosper". At the other end of the story he notes that "the Revolution does a chapter in Scottish-American relations", and he might almost have concluded the book in 1783, though he has some useful things to say about the post-war complications, legal and financial. Almost the only criticism one might make of the book is that it contains too many typographical errors, including at least two scrambled dates - 1773 for 1770 on page 88 and 1777 for 1770 on page 131 - and a highly respected Edinburgh firm of Writers to the Signet will not be pleased to see after their name not the initials W. S. but W. C.

Brock, with his mastery of detail, is better entitled than most to proceed to generalizations. Lowland Scots in the Glasgow Tobacco Trade "organised the most efficient business of the age" and formed merchant communities in all the commercial cities, they permeated the official establishment, they supplied clergy for the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches, they served as tutors in hundreds of colonial families and they established schools. But, above all, they had a powerful influence upon medicine, philosophy, literature and the political theory of the revolutionaries. Nor was intellectual influence exerted only by the professional classes, for of 166 tobacco merchants identified between 1740 and 1790, thirty-six had matriculated at the University of Glasgow and many others attended classes there. This is not the popular picture, which is apt to represent Scottish emigrants as being chiefly defeated Jacobites and dispossessed crofters, and Brock warns against "a host of deeply-rooted misconceptions".

Every American who seeks his roots in Scotland thinks he belongs to a clan and wants to know "what tartan he is entitled to wear", but the chances that his Scottish ancestor was a Lowlander are dismissed as a relic of a culture which he despised. Royce Kervick has recently collected, in an article on "Under the kiln: Variations on the Scottish-American Ground" (*Journal of American Ethnic History*, Vol 1, no 2) facts which can only raise shudders in those who know some history. "Highland clans and Lowland family

associations, virtually unknown in the heyday of Scottish emigration, by 1979 blanketed the country in tartan" and of the 2300 pipers and 1200 drummers who belonged to 180 pipe bands in 1979, nearly a third had no family ties whatever with Scotland at all, let alone with the Highlands. The craze is agreeable to those who invent and market "clan tartans" and to self-styled "chiefs" who receive from their supposed "clansmen" in the United States an adulation to which they are not accustomed in Scotland.

In the later part of the book there is a "Guide to the Sources", extending to thirty pages, arranged under headings corresponding broadly to those of the chapters. Brock was fortunate to be organizing his survey at a time when work on Scottish archives, at both central and local levels, made it incomparably easier than it used to be to discover what is available. Thus details can be given about the contents of the Scottish national archives, papers in the National Library of Scotland, material in American states,

Scottish regional, district and university collections, and documents in private hands which have been surveyed by the National Register of Archives (Scotland), as well as published sources. Anyone who sets out in future to produce books dealing comprehensively with the subject will find his paths well signposted.

There are two appendices, which like Chapter Six on "Scotland and American Medicine", are the work of C. Helen Brock. One of them lists "Publications by Emigrant Scottish Doctors" and another "Scottish Doctors practising in America and American Doctors educated in Scotland", with some 500 names; and there are biographical notes on some clergy too. The index, which runs to nearly thirty pages, adds some hundreds of names of Scottish emigrants, not all of them in Donald Whyte's *Dictionary of Scottish Emigrants to the U.S.A.* Brock's work will help in many ways to satisfy the unending demand of Americans for Scottish pedigrees.

It is easy enough to see some of the reasons for Scottish success in education and thrill, for example, of the adaptability of a doctor who so overcame "the Scottish peculiarities of pronunciation" that "only a practised and acute ear could have discovered that he was once a native of Scotland". But there were disappointments on both sides. Of one shipload of immigrants it was remarked that not "one of a thousand of these deluded people" did not wish themselves home again after twelve months in America, and Charles Niaber, who thought he was going to a college which was "the Princeton of the west", found that it consisted of two rooms and a handful of indifferent students. On the other hand, Arthur Lee wrote of Edinburgh, "Nothing can be more disagreeable to me than this town and the manners of the people in it." John Lang, offered a living in Virginia, seems to have thought that the immorality of the parishioners was not offset by a salary of 16,000 pounds of "sweet scented tobacco".

## The militia question

Duncan Forbes

DAVID R. RAYNOR (Editor)

*Sister Peg: A pamphlet hitherto unknown by David Hume*  
127pp. Cambridge University Press.  
£15.50.  
0 521 24299 1

What is "unknown" about this pamphlet on the Scottish Militia question, written in 1760, is that it is by Hume, and not Adam Ferguson. David R. Raynor has convinced me, at any rate, though he hardly does himself justice when he says that "everything points to Hume as the author". It is not as easy as that. For instance, it is a rather dangerous argument to say that Ferguson didn't write anything else like this. Hume didn't either. Nor does the use of "Mac Lurcher" for the Highlanders necessarily exclude Ferguson, though in English pronunciation it is even ruder than Dr Raynor supposes. In so far as a Lurcher was a sort of mongrel. But one might

argue that this would be a good smokescreen, and if one insists that Ferguson would be unlikely to be rude about Highlanders for any reason and in any cause, one might say the same about Hume and "Lewis Robson" or the French people. And if that stands only for certain aspects of French behaviour and policy, one could say the same for "Mac Lurcher". Not all Highlanders were thieves and Jacobites, and public disavowal of one's Gaelic provenance is a far from untypical Highland phenomenon, though I do not know precisely when it began.

One might argue that the circumstantial knowledge displayed in *Sister Peg*, even the arguments, were not outside the abilities of one of reasonably competent and interested contemporary (think how much a great many people have learnt or could easily gather, about the legal, political and historical background of the Falklands Crisis, in a matter of weeks) were it not for certain specifically Humean echoes that Raynor very cleverly and on the whole convincingly

picks up in his Notes, which also help the reader to identify the allegorical goings-on for the most part fully and professionally enough. (Though Hume in his letter to Montesquieu did not praise Hardwicke's abolition of the heritable jurisdictions - on the contrary.)

As for the pamphlet's style, the point about Hume's "identification" with the wits of Queen Anne's reign is a good one, and on the whole the style is not what one would expect from Ferguson. I say "on the whole" because towards the end there are what sound very like Fergusonian resonances. "Without we carry this quality along with us, others advantages are of little avail." Could Hume, in 1760, possibly have written that? And some of the matter too, of the moralists, "Machiavellian", anti-"corruption" variety, is what one associates more with Ferguson than with Hume. In fact I am led to speculate whether perhaps Ferguson wrote the final chapter (presented as a speech made by a Scottish member in the House of Commons) himself, and then handed over to Hume, or something of the sort.

*Peg* is no masterpiece. In fact realization of this is, according to Raynor, why Hume suppressed it. I cannot believe that he was writing "for posterity". And it is more important for biographers, bibliographers, and political and social historians than for historians of political theory. In fact it illustrates the "machiavellian" that is his feeling of national outrage and friendship, rather than the detached "philosopher", and incidentally it was not "Hume's strong pronouncements against standing armies, and in favour of citizen militias" that led me to be surprised that he had not devoted an essay to the subject; what surprised me was Hume's missing such a good opportunity to devote a separate essay to the "philosophical" treatment of so hot and important a controversy.

*Peg* does not tell us much more about Hume's political thought and attitude to militias than we know already, and one can only assume that the editors accepted it for the series to which it looks somewhat out of place because (1) anything discovered to be by Hume is important, (2) anything connected with "Fellow Humanism". Raynor's Introduction ends with the remark that a reader of this text might feel inclined to call Hume the "Scottish Machiavelli". I feel inclined to call this the sort of red herring that is liable to be washed up by the "civic humanist" spat that is running so high just now (my apologies to anglers). It spools a nice piece of detective work and a very ingenious and entertaining display of learning.

Richly illustrated and with a foreword by Lord Home, *The Salmon Book* by Douglas Sutherland (160pp. Collins, £7.95, 000 216664 X) was published recently. A portrait of one of the most famous Scottish gillies, Auld Rob 'o the Trow, painted by Robert Rian, is on the front of the jacket.

## FICTION

## Playing fast and loose

Patricia Craig

JULIA O'FAOLAIN

*The Obedient Wife*  
230pp. Allen Lane. £7.50.  
0 7139 1467 X

As a symbol of Catholic tenacity, the mass rock - associated with Ireland in the penal days - has been exchanged for the rock mass, which signifies the church's eagerness to present itself as a thoroughly modern institution - ease of manner, showmanship and all. An appropriate setting for such mass and ordinary affections, on his own terms, he is either damned from the start of any carnal affair, or "living by marked-down values, an unlikely trait in a lover". Can it be that adulteration of church doctrines encourages adultery? To play fast and loose with selected precepts while professing a fundamental belief in the church's moral imperatives indicates, at any rate, a certain infirmity of purpose.

The novel is about failures of instinct, as well as (more commonplace) social and conjugal failures; what spoils Leo for Carla, as much as anything else, is a lack of grace in his handling of emotional matters. "Leo, you're gauche", she tells him; he cannot deny it. (The caustic exchanges between these two give the novel some of its most striking effects.) Unlike poor, Catholic, confused Sybil, whose passion for the priest is denied an outlet, Carla cannot consider herself a rebel for lust; truly, she has nothing to rebel against, and, just as in an abstract way, she everything around her shakes, is the product of a secular code which

encompasses order, solicitude and fastidiousness. Brought up on Boccaccio, she is apt to view clerical lapses from celibacy in a worldly and tolerant spirit somewhat at odds with the intense asceticism of Northern Catholicism - even in its debased state. Not that Carla has any feeling for religion at all: the church's efforts to make itself palatable embarrass her, its excesses dismay her and its compromises worry her, once she forgoes the right to be disinterested. In her relations with Leo, she cannot quite separate the priest from the man, and it is only the latter she has any use for. Leo, by his choice of profession, has cut himself outside the range of ordinary affections; on his own terms, he is either damned from the start of any carnal affair, or "living by marked-down values, an unlikely trait in a lover". Can it be that adulteration of church doctrines encourages adultery? To play fast and loose with selected precepts while professing a fundamental belief in the church's moral imperatives indicates, at any rate, a certain infirmity of purpose.

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denied or threatened", she observes, in an effort to define the pressure that can turn a forthright mother-in-five into a clerical groupie (the phrase is uttered by Sybil's husband in a moment of outrage). Such women are behaving as men used to behave over virgins, Leo declares. "Scalp-hunting". Or else "it's a safe game". Whatever the complications or possibilities for distress involved in priests' relationships with women, the irregular will probably find the business exasperating, ludicrous or distasteful.

There is plenty of scope for comedy in Julia O'Faolain's novel, but she has chosen not to present her material in a comic mode. (That she can be funny is evident from certain asides, such as the following, summing up a traditional pronouncement on female adultery: "Men were less likely to lose their heads and hearts and what they did with their other parts was consequently of less account.") Instead, she coolly assesses the circumstances and traits that have got her characters into their present predicament, and still more coolly allows their defects and misapprehensions to become apparent in the course of the narrative. Carla's instinct, for example, is less sound than she imagines; where her son is concerned, it hasn't been working properly at all.

The *Obedient Wife* is an exceptionally polished work; if its ending disappoints feminists, who require gestures of social rebelliousness from their fiction, just as Catholic readers used to require wholesomeness from theirs, it is none the less, appropriate, in that it represents an assertion of the values its heroine has lived by.

## Bodily tracts

Roger Scruton

MARGE PIERCY

*Braided Lives*  
445pp. Allen Lane. £7.95.  
0 7139 1478 5

LEE ZACHARIAS

*Lessons*  
342pp. Faber. £7.95.  
0 571 11910 7

HILMA WOLITZER

*Hearts*  
324pp. Brighton: Harvester Press.  
£6.95.  
0 7108 0475 X

Marge Piercy is an established author, and presumably has an established readership - though it is very difficult to gauge from *Braided Lives* what qualities of commitment and literary endurance are required in order to belong to it. The book is written in a chatty, cluttered style, too reminiscent of a woman's magazine to sustain the feminist ideology of the text; at the same time the succession of mundane episodes so lacks urgency that only a kept woman would have the time and curiosity to read with interest beyond the first twenty pages.

The novel concerns a girl's adolescence during the 1950s. It describes middle-class home life, campus parties, casual encounters, pregnancy and abortion. From all this the girl emerges, with social, personal, and political commitments. At first we are treated to samples of her poetry; later, poetry is exchanged for opinions. It is hard to say which is the more excruciatingly naïve. The author boldly assumes that one will have been so touched by her heroine's do-it-yourself abortion as to feel unquestioning sympathy for a woman's "right to choose", but this assumption is hardly consonant with the extreme crudeness with which the experience (like everything else) is described. Not that Marge Piercy is a ranter: far from it. She is too lenient towards her heroine's own self-indulgences to find time for her own.

*Braided Lives*, however, is a memorable book; it contains about the worst examples of English prose that I have come across in a published novel. The following sentence is not untypical: "I also find myself hard in love in a way I have to search far back in my life to match." The machine-gun fire of monosyllables, the desperate cliché ("deep in love") avoided only by an absurd figure of speech ("hard in love"), the obscenity of grammar and sentiment, the unfeeling casualness of tone, the loss of all ambiguity and directness - such is characteristic of the entire idiom of the novel.

*Braided Lives* is enthusiastically commended in the publisher's blurb to *Kinfolk*. The same curious praise is also lavished by her publisher on Lee Zacharias for her first novel, *Lessons*. Ms Zacharias is scarcely more conscious of the finer points of writing than Marge Piercy, but the psychological states of her heroine would be illustrated by literary subtleties:

"Did you...? I wanted to ask if she put out for him, I wanted to ask if she put out for Dick, but I didn't know how to phrase it. My mother had said 'have intercourse', but that sounded disgusting, like having an enema. Sandy said 'get screwed', but I didn't want to be like Sandy any more."

Not wanting to be like Sandy any more is one of the many vagrant life-projects that compel her heroine through the episodes of *Lessons*, while employing a style so gross, inferior to that of Barbara Cartland, as to risk the tiny promise of literary effect that such meagre equipment contains. And while a writer's feelings remain on the level that requires Miss Cartland's style, it would be far better to imitate her content.

Julia O'Faolain contributes a story, "This is My Body", to the most recent issue of *Sho! Story Monthly* (70pp. Ardmory, Methven Road, Whitecraig, Glasgow. £1.); other contributions are a new story of David Brophy, "Single Out", by James Thurber, Fred Unquart and J. V. Stevenson, and Chapter IV of Alasdair Gray's novel *Janine*.

between men and women, and a kind of vulnerability which enabled her to observe others as though they were not mere extensions of herself. In the end I even began to feel spasms of sympathy for this comic character who has the had taste to take herself for tragic. Her search for an author remains, however, unfulfilled, and the book ends as plotlessly and as pointlessly as it begins.

As far as plot is concerned, Hilma Wolitzer's *Hearts* is a definite improvement. A young woman, suddenly widowed, travels with her step-daughter to the grandparents who are to look after the child. American distances provide several days of travel, and during that time the woman falls in love with a hitch-hiker, while the child emerges from hatred and pain to see her father's widow as a person to whom she can and must turn for solace and companionship. The transformation of the child is convincingly described, and Ms Wolitzer has an eye for detail. But it is hard to read the novel with any relish. The same obsession with the biological fact of womanhood pervades its pages, and the reader is constantly assailed by gynaeological technicalities. The child has begun her periods: we no longer show a blood-soaked sanitary towel in the lavatory. The widow at first suspects, and then knows herself to be pregnant; the details of a pregnancy test are painstakingly described. There are long dull moments in the abortion clinic, absurdly brought to an end by a bomb attack; people are constantly inspecting themselves and others; nobody can go to the bathroom without the author noting it ("While Robin was using the bathroom, Linda could hear Willie moving around next door in number 9"). "Holding her legs together she tottered to the bathroom door and knocked. 'Hey, she said, 'I have to go in'; 'Linda was sleepy and for once she claimed the bathroom first', and so on). The obsession with the body and its functions is so great that all experience, even that of erotic desire, is invaded by it. "His thigh, resting at least six inches from Linda's, seemed swollen and confined by the chinos, and she felt an erotic impulse that shocked and appalled her. Now, of all times. It could have something to do with a hormonal imbalance; so many things were going on inside her that she could not discern or control."

The emergence of the gynaeological novel should be no cause for surprise. For some time now feminists have been claiming that women should cease to be ashamed of their natural condition, and that they should integrate their unorgasmic traces into the totality of their experience and so resume "control" over bodies which have for too long been obedient to the whims and fantasies of man. The result leads one to think that it was not only shame that led the female novelists of the golden age to pass over these matters. The issue is ideological, and it is probably necessary for a reviewer to protest that he is not against menstruation, that some of his best friends even menstruate, before suggesting that it requires more than ordinary literary skill to evoke an interest, whether lyrical or dramatic, in its description. The poetry of Bloom's defecation is one of the great achievements of English literature; the aspiring feminist writer should study it, and take care. To incorporate such details into a narrative without detracting from the gentle irony and touching emotion which pervade it, Joyce had to remake the entire structure, form and purpose of the novel. To incorporate a comic dramatic narrative with such details, while employing a style so gross, inferior to that of Barbara Cartland, as to risk the tiny promise of literary effect that such meagre equipment contains. And while a writer's feelings remain on the level that requires Miss Cartland's style, it would be far better to imitate her content.

## The sin of slavery

Brian Morton

C. DUNCAN RICE

*The Scots Abolitionists: 1833-1861*  
221pp. Louisiana State University Press. £16.50 (paperback, £6.60).  
0 8071 0861 8

Between the West Indies Abolition Act of 1833 and the American Civil War, the main impetus of British agitation against slavery shifted northwards to Scotland. The reasons for this were many and various and said much, as C. Duncan Rice describes, about the special relationship between Scotland and the US in the developing "Atlantic community".

Both societies, with the same theatrical past and contemporary economic dominance, suffered the misbegotten of a sharply polarized world-view. Economically dependent on the slave system, Scots and Americans were nonetheless opposed to it on the basis of religious (and political) conviction. Slavery was always more than a secular issue; it had profound eschatological overtones for Protestants on both sides of the Atlantic. The moral issues surrounding the slave question - responsibility, non-resistance, free will and redemption - were precisely those at the heart of militant Calvinism and, by extension, Presbyterian democracy. The 1833 Abolition Act removed the immediate target of British agitation but widened the overall issue; the Act stirred American anti-slavery groups and helped develop the crucial pattern of

transatlantic support which lasted through the years of the Civil War. As the specifically religious dimension came to the fore in Britain in the 1830s, the battle of gravity shifted towards a Scottish Evangelicalism which, in a theological revolution, little documented and poorly explained, had captured much of the intellectual vigour of the Old Kirk and the Enlightenment. In comparison with the English episcopacy and its own more moderate forerunners, Scottish evangelism was militant, outward-looking and internationalist. The Scottish Enlightenment had never matched with any serious practical commitment; the starker pragmatic viewpoint of the evangelists put the stress on active participation.

The Protestant-Puritan tendency to see earthly issues in cosmic terms found a curious common ground with nineteenth-century liberalism; slavery was not just inhumane and irrational, it was part and parcel of man's sinful nature, embodied in a commercial society. The enlightened philanthropy of Scots and American reformers was based on a romantic nationalism which actually adopted the abstract internationalist tone of liberal rationalists like Mazzini or the earlier Herder. It was a curious and complex coincidence of an essentially archaic religious tradition with the European political avant-garde. For the Scottish reformers, "America" remained a convenient emblem for their own national, religious and cultural dilemmas. There was, the same gap there between metropolis and province, the gap which had sparked

off the War of Independence; the same dissenting background; the same troubled nationalism. Equally, Scottish culture had, by the mid-1830s, lapsed dramatically from the glories of Hume's Edinburgh; both Scotland and the young US were culturally and politically "provincial". The slave question put national issues in a universal context and added the desired moral seasoning.

Liberal Scots and American Northerners felt themselves united to an alliance against the evils of Southern slavery and, though perhaps only half-consciously, the oppressive English "South". Abolitionism thus emerges as a suppressed and oblique episode in Scottish nationalism. In that period when the nationalist spirit (wounded by the Act of Union, the restoration of aristocratic patronage, the Jacobite turmoil and, more recently, the Porteous Riots) seemed at its lowest ebb.

The development of an "Atlantic community" reinforced the sense of kinship. The introduction around 1830 of a regular transatlantic packet made a regular correspondence feasible at last. The churches and universities established contacts and the pulpit, no less than the lecture-room, became the vehicle for polemical exchanges. Magazines like the *Edinburgh Review* and *Blackwood's* turned to America and specifically to the slavery question for the intellectual stimulus they had begun to lose.

The Scots' habit of regarding everything themselves included in the broadest and most morally abstract of terms has meant that the period of abolitionist activity is a particularly

enigmatic one. Dr Rice's account of the Glasgow and Edinburgh Emancipation Societies will doubtless be of interest and value to the Americanists for whom his study is primarily (and admittedly) intended. Whatever his precise intention, he has provided a valuable, if narrowly focused, account of one of the most telling movements in modern Scottish history. With the wider perspective afforded by comparison with the American movement, Scottish abolitionism appears as a crucial chapter in the development of modern nationalism. However much is revealed about overseas attitudes to American institutions, the most significant parts of *The Scots Abolitionists* are those glimpses of the working-out of national and cultural identity at a period of Scottish history which is particularly obscure because it is indirect, outward-turning and in nationalist terms, self-defining.

It is perhaps fashionable to regard idealism as a convenient cover for baser concerns and motives. Certainly Rice suggests that principled disagreements over abolition were used as masks to ends that had nothing to do with the plight of black slaves and a great deal to do with religious factionalism and a suspicion of distant government. The major drawback of his study is inherent in the subject: by concentrating on something apparently distinct and self-contained (and the reformers were never entirely clear how and where abolitionism fitted into their lives) he makes top great a demand on our ability to reconstruct the general issues.

## Suffering in W2

Linda Taylor

BERNICE RUBENS

*Madame Sousatzka*  
187pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.  
0 241 10644 6

The characters in Bernice Rubens's novels are prey to a feeling of suffocation; their struggles are private, dark, futile; the pressures on them are failure, guilt, neglect and loneliness. Their lives informed by Jewishness (often their own, as well as the author's), they strive for a place in a bleak world, love ambivalently and why point the finger at their own misdeeds. "About suffering I know plenty," says Mrs Crominski to her broken English when Madame Sousatzka tells her not to attend her son's piano lessons. "All the mothers must suffer little, the toffy too well the masochistic pleasure that that involves. Suffering begets guilt and Marcus, the eleven-year-old Cromoski son, caught in the crossfire between mother and piano teacher, constantly vows 'to make it up to' Mrs Crominski for his lapses of affection, his irritability, his secretiveness and inconsistency; he 'felt his love for her killing him'."

In *Madame Sousatzka*, Bernice Rubens's second novel (first published in 1962, it is now reissued as the first in a projected uniform edition, and is simply to be turned into a film), Sousatzka and Cromoski are at the beginning of a line of middle-aged female characters whose failures fill the pages of Rubens's books. Madame Sousatzka, though, stands out from their usual "brown world" of dowdy clothes, unsightly hats and lispic postures as something of an exotic. From Marcus's Stamford Hill perspective, she seems to embody everything that is vivid and exciting. She lives in W2 with a countess called "Uncle", an osteopath called Mr Cordie, and a fortune teller called Popsy. She is a specialist who teaches piano to prodigies by the Sousatzka school.

"You must forget everything you have learnt... The hands are nothing, my darling. I want to be the whole body."

The Sousatzka method, though, is a mad. Madame has so far produced one

one famous. The exotic trappings of her life are a disguise: her osteopath has no patients, her countess is a sedentary bohemian, her fortune teller is a prostitute and she herself is Mrs Susatzka, a Jewish pianist, beginning in darkness with Mrs Crominski's returning to a shrouded house, and ending with Madame Sousatzka drawing back the curtains on a dawning day.

The law of nature she should have died of a broken heart". Instead, she turns to the piano - "Once again, Sousatzka, to a scale there is no end and no beginning." The structure of the novel supports this philosophy, beginning in darkness with Mrs Crominski's returning to a shrouded house, and ending with Madame Sousatzka drawing back the curtains on a dawning day.

## Criminal proceedings

T. J. Binyon

MARGARET YORKE

*Devil's Work*  
170pp. Hutchinson. £6.95.  
0 09 147580 5

Made redundant in middle-age and wretchedly purposelessly round the town of Berbridge, Alan Parker meets a townie who is a young widow with a small daughter, Tessa. Later Tessa vanishes and Alan is, for a time, suspected by the police. Violence done to children can be too facile a card to play, but Margaret Yorke wrings the heartstrings with care and subtlety in a well-written study of conflicting neuroses.

RUTH RENDELL

*Master of the Moor*  
219pp. Hutchinson. £6.95.  
0 09 146930 9

Stephen Whalby lives under the brooding presence of Vangmoor, in central England. He's obsessed by the bleak, high expanse with its deserted lead mines and ancient standing stones. Though he immediately

informs the police when he finds the body of a murdered woman on the moor, his obsession is known, and he comes under suspicion. And suspicion is doubled when a second body is found in similar circumstances. Inaccurately written and constructed, this is another of Ruth Rendell's skilful studies in abnormal psychology: a powerful, intriguing, if ultimately depressing novel.

In later Rubens, the dice are heavily loaded against survival and, by 1979, in *Spring Sonata*, life is so unpleasant that the potential Marcus figure refuses to be born. In 1962, though, life was hard but it wasn't annihilating. In *Madame Sousatzka* Bernice Rubens lightly shrugged off her sense of suffocation with a precise and acerbic wit.

LAWRENCE BLOK

*The Burglar Who Studied Spinoza*  
213pp. Robert Hale. £6.75.  
0 7091 9404 8

New York burglar Bernie Rhodenbarr, now with a permanent partner in the shape of dog-groomer Carolyn Kaiser (described by Bernie's girl friend as "that lesbian dwarf, the fat little one who always smells of Wet Dog"), turns over a select residence on West Eighteenth Street and emerges with a pair of emerald ear-rings, a Piaget wristwatch, a 1913 Liberty Head nickel, and a bushel or two of trouble. It's practically impossible not to take to Bernie: he's literate, candid and, to be extremely funny. Deep down, too, he has a fundamental honesty: when it's not a question of other people's personal property.